positive direction. There was a general improvement in motivation and students discovered that learning could be fun and useful. They had a realization that they were empowered for life and that they themselves had control over what and whether they learned. There was also a growth in their awareness that affected other domains in their life. The success or failure of an individual student or teacher working in an autonomous setting rests largely on their attitudes.

Ten aspects of autonomy revealed by the ALMS

In 1997, Karlsson, Kjisik and Nordlund (1996) offered ten aspects of autonomy which were determined via the Autonomous Learning Modules Project of the Helsinki University Language center.

1. Autonomy is a capacity that has to be learned.
2. The road to autonomy is a process.
3. The state of autonomy is essentially unstable.
4. Autonomy involves a change in the power relationships.
5. Autonomy requires supportive structures, both internal and external.
6. Autonomy requires a conscious awareness of the learning process.
7. Autonomy has both individual and social aspects.
8. Autonomy is not limited to the classroom.
9. Autonomy has to be adapted to different cultural contexts.
10. Autonomy is closely related to social identity.

Some of the dimensions of learner autonomy

Self-direction

Lee (1998) implemented a self-directed learning program for tertiary students in Hong Kong and found that self-directed learning paves the way for students' development of autonomy. She contended that her self-directed learning program was more successful with those students who demonstrated some degree of autonomy in learning. She reported that learner autonomy and self-directed learning were increasingly associated with social and collaborative learning.

Lee's self-directed learning program showed that the more enthusiastic students enjoyed self-directed learning and wanted to continue independent learning after the course. Kohonen

(1999) affirmed that in terms of the conception of man, learners needed to be considered as self-directed, intentional persons who could develop their competencies in three interrelated areas of knowledge, skills and awareness.

Learner control

One of the characteristics of autonomous learners is that they are more inclined to exercise more control with regard to their learning. Dickinson (1993) asserted that when learners were in control of their learning, they were exercising autonomy and one aspect of the control was in the area of assessment. Warshauer, Turbee and Roberts (1996) argued that a main goal of modern approaches to language teaching is to enhance student autonomy and learner control over the learning process. Fayard (1999) stated that control reduced learner passivity, increased receptivity to language and boosted the self-confidence of learners.

Learner control is an important issue in language learning. Successful language learners can perceive themselves in control of their learning (Dickinson, 1995). In his article, Nishkura (1997) mentioned control and responsibility, intrinsic motivation and self-generated behavior as some of the main characteristics of successful language learners. Nishikura claimed that the use of concept of "control" could provide a framework from which learning interaction takes place.

The present study

All male and female B.A. and M.A. students majoring in English Literature in the Department of Foreign Languages and Linguistics of Shiraz University were involved in the present study. Participants were from two levels of education referred to here as undergraduate (B.A. students) and graduate (M.A. students). On the whole, 168 students (53 males and 115 females) participated in the study. They differed with regard to their age and marital status. Tables 1 and 2 present the composition of students from different age groups and different marital status.

Table 1: Composition of students considering age

Age Group	Frequency	Percent
18-21	86	51.2
22-25	65	38.7
26 and over	17	10.1

Table2: Composition of students regarding marital status

Marital Status	Frequency	Percent
Single	131	78
Married	35	20.8
Unanswered	2	1.19

Table 3: Composition of participants regarding sex

Sex	Frequency	Percent
Male	53	31.5
Female	115	68

Table 4: Composition of students regarding GPA

GPA	Frequency	Percent
17-20 (A)	79	47
14-16.99 (B)	76	45.2
12-13.99 (C)	11	6.5
Unanswered	2	1.19

*In Iranian universities students are evaluated according to a scale which runs from 0 to 20. An academic average of 17 to 20 which is considered as an A average, while an average between 14-16.99 is evaluated as B and one in the range of 12 to 13-99 out of 20 is deemed as C.

The necessary data were collected via a questionnaire the items of which were taken from two other questionnaires by Cotterall (1995) and Cotterall (1999) with some adaptations. The questionnaire was in the form of a five-point Likert-type rating scale.

The questionnaire was administered to all B.A. and M.A. students majoring in English Literature in the Department of Foreign Languages and Linguistics in Shiraz University. About 182 students received the questionnaire and they were provided enough time to complete it. From 182 questionnaires administered to the students, 168 (92.3%) were returned to the researcher.

Factor Analysis was also performed which served not only to confirm the validity of the questionnaire but also to find the underlying factors of autonomy. Based on factor analysis, five underlying factors were extracted. These factors were learner independence, dependence on the teacher, learner confidence, attitudes towards language learning and self-assessment.

Results

When the means of students of different age groups were compared and the one-way ANOVA was applied, it was found that the differences in means were not statistically significant for any of the factors of learner independence, dependence on teachers, learner confidence, attitudes towards language learning and self-assessment (See Appendix A for means and standard deviations of students and the one way ANOVA for the five factors by age).

In order to obtain a measure of autonomy for students of each age group, a one-way ANOVA was run and the means of students of different age groups were compared. Although students of the age group 18-21 had the highest mean (129.81), the differences were not statistically significant.

Table 5: Means and standard deviations of students of different age groups considering learner autonomy

Age	Mean	SD
18-21	129.81	12.63
22-25	126.53	12.29
26 and over	126.23	18.57
Total	128.18	13.23

Table 6: One-way ANOVA for learner autonomy by age

Source of Variance	df	Sum of Squares	Mean Square	F	P
Between Group	2	469.04	234.52	1.34	.2634
Within Group	165	28770.23	174.36		
Total	167	29239.27			

Those students who were single received higher means in all factors except attitudes towards language learning for which married students obtained higher means. The differences in means were significant regarding self-assessment at the .03 level. In light of learner independence, dependence on the teacher, learner confidence and attitudes towards language learning the differences were not significant. It can be argued that the concept of self is not probably as much important to a married person as it is to a single one. Single students usually have more time to ponder over and to assess their learning experiences.

Table 7: Comparison of participants with different marital status considering the 5 factors

Factors	Mean (Sing.)	Mean (Mar.)	SD (Sing.)	SD (Mar.)	t-value	df	2-Tail Sig
Learner Independence	41.77	39.40	8.61	7.49	1.61	164	.131
Dependence on Teacher	26.28	25.97	3.19	3.98	.46	164	.650
Learner Confidence	28.13	27.49	4.40	4.36	.77	164	.442
Attitudes towards Language Learning	14.25	15.09	3.42	3.47	1.27	164	.211
Self-assessment	18.58	17.51	2.28	2.58	2.23	164	.030

The t-test showed that those students who were single obtained higher means in learner autonomy (129) in comparison with that of the married ones. Nevertheless, the difference was not significant.

Table 8: Comparison of married and single students considering learner autonomy

Marital Status	Mean	SD	df	t-value	Level of Sig
Single	129	13.28			
Married	125.45	13.12	164	1.42	.16

The means of males and females were compared using t-test for independent samples and it was found that females obtained slightly higher means regarding the factors of learner independence, dependence on teachers, learner confidence, and self-assessment and males received a higher mean with regard to attitudes towards language learning. However, the differences did not turn out to be significant as presented in the table.

Table 9: Comparison of means of males and females considering the 5 factors

Factors	Mean (Male)	Mean (Female)	SD (Male)	SD (Female)	t-value	df	2-Tail Sig
Learner Independence	40.81	41.46	8.81	8.19	.45	166	.651
Dependence on Teacher	25.68	26.41	2.87	3.45	1.45	166	.149
Learner Confidence	27	28.44	4.76	4.10	1.91	166	.060
Attitudes towards Language Learning	14.72	14.25	2.87	3.21	.76	166	.448
Self-assessment	18.23	18.42	2.87	2.10	.43	166	.665

The means of males and females as indexes of autonomy were compared. Although females had a higher mean (128.99), the difference was not statistically significant. The results are shown in the following table.

Table 10: Comparison of males and females considering learner autonomy

Sex	Mean	SD	df	t-value	Level of Sig
Male	126.43	15.64			
Female	128.99	11.94	166	1.06	.29

In order to obtain a general index of learner autonomy of students with different GPAs, a one-way ANOVA was carried out and the comparison of means showed that the differences in means were statistically significant at .0051 level and the students whose averages were in the range 17-20 had the highest mean.

Table 11: The Means and SDs of students with different gpas considering learner autonomy

GPA (Out of 20)	Mean	SD
17-20 (A)	131.41	10.56
14-16.99 (B)	125.48	14.66
12-13.99 (C)	122.25	14.07
Total	128.18	13.23

Table 12: One-way ANOVA for Learner Autonomy by GPA

Source of Variance	df	Sum of Squares	Mean Square	F	P
Between Group	2	1798.94	899.47	5.46	.0051
Within Group	164	27004.45	164.66		
Total	166	28803.40			

The results of the Scheffe Test are depicted here. It was found that the means of the first group (students with an average range of A) and those of the third group (students with an average C) were significantly different at .05 level.

Table 13: The Results of the Scheffe Test for learner autonomy by GPA

Mean	Group	1	2	3
131.41	1			*
125.48	2			
122.25	3			

Summary and conclusion

The present study intended to compare different views about autonomy and empowerment, to discuss some of the aspects of learner autonomy and to shed light on the Autonomous

Learning Modules (ALMS) and those aspects revealed by the ALMS. It mainly aimed at examining the role of age, marital status, gender and academic achievement in students' predispositions towards autonomy. Factor analysis of responses was run and five underlying factors were identified. These underlying dimensions were learner independence, dependence on the teacher, learner confidence, attitudes towards language learning and self-assessment. Though index of autonomy proved to be highest for students who were in the age range of 18.64 and lowest for students in the age range of 26 and over, the differences were not statistically significant. It can be concluded that the age of students does not influence their predispositions towards autonomy. Single students obtained a higher score in self-assessment; however, the differences did not turn out to be significant considering learner autonomy. Students' academic achievement affects to a great extent their predispositions towards autonomy in that those students with an average of A demonstrated a great deal of autonomy while those students who had an average of C showed the lowest index of autonomy. Though index of autonomy was higher for females, the differences were not statistically significant. In other words, gender does not have impacts on students' readiness for autonomy. By and large, it can be noted that autonomy is a desired capacity which should be inculcated in the minds of all learners.

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Appendix A:

Means and standard deviations of students of different age groups considering learner independence

Age	Mean	SD
18-21	42.29	8.87
22-25	40.20	7.11
26 and over	40.05	9.96
Total	41.25	8.37

One-way ANOVA for factor 1 by age

Source of Variance	df	Sum of Squares	Mean Square	F	P<
Between Group	2	188.92	94.46	1	.35
Within Group	165	11521.07	69.82		
Total	167	11709.99			

Means and standard deviations of students of different age groups considering dependence on the teacher

Age	Mean	SD
18-21	26.03	3.28
22-25	26.44	3.27
26 and over	25.94	3.69
Total	26.18	3.28

One-way ANOVA for factor 2 by age

Source of Variance	df	Sum of Squares	Mean Square	F	P<
Between Group	2	7.38	3.69	0.33	.71
Within Group	165	1795.89	10.88		
Total	167	1803.27			

Means and standard deviations of students of different age groups considering their learner confidence

Age	Mean	SD
18-21	28.73	4.31
22-25	27.30	3.89
26 and over	26.82	5.68
Total	27.98	4.35

One-way ANOVA for factor 3 by age

Source of Variance	df	Sum of Squares	Mean Square	F	P<
Between Group	2	100.81	50.40	2	.7098
Within Group	165	30.96	18.60		
Total	167	31.69			

Means and standard deviations of students of different age groups considering attitudes towards language learning

Age	Mean	SD
18-21	14.11	3.33
22-25	14.49	3.26
26 and over	15.47	4.41
Total	14.39	3.42

One-way ANOVA for factor 4 by age

Source of Variance	df	Sum of Squares	Mean Square	F	P<
Between Group	2	26.96	13.48	1	.1481
Within Group	165	1937.31	11.74		
Total	167	19.64			

One-way ANOVA for factor 5 by age

Source of Variance	df	Sum of Squares	Mean Square	F	P<
Between Group	2	14.36	7.17	1	.2873
Within Group	165	920.21	5.57		
Total	167	934.57			