Learning to Learn Competencies at Omani Cycle Two Schools: Students' Perceptions and EFL Teachers' Beliefs

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Abstract: **This study aimed to investigate Omani Cycle Two students' perceptions and Omani English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers' beliefs regarding students learning autonomy. Three main areas of learning to learn competencies were explored to investigate learning autonomy: learning skills, the ability to take control of learning, and reflecting and evaluating learning. The study uses a mixed-method research design to investigate the perceptions of 383 grade nine students in Oman using a questionnaire. Also, four female English teachers who were teaching grade nine in the academic year 2021/2022 were interviewed in a focus group. The quantitative data analysis of the learning autonomy questionnaire indicated that grade nine students held moderated beliefs in their learning skills, ability to take control of their learning, and the ability to reflect and evaluate their learning. However, the teachers believed that students need to be trained and directed to acquire learning to learn competencies.**

Keywords: **cycle two students, learning to learn competencies, learning autonomy**

I. INTRODUCTION

Special attention is paid to skillful individuals who are competent and successful in a dynamic and innovative world. A large amount of research in education in the 20th and 21st centuries has shown that a person can enhance their skills by developing learning autonomy. Thus, for learners to be autonomous, they need to develop learning to learn competencies. These competencies can be divided into three main areas: "practical skills for participating in learning, taking control of own learning and reflecting on and evaluating own learning success" (Cambridge University, 2019 p.2).

1.1. Research Problem, Objectives and Aim

The Omani Curriculum Standards Framework for grade 1-9 emphasizes the importance of twenty-first century skills, which is listed as the third general aim of education in Oman. The English language subject contributes to twenty-first century skills by developing students' skills and motivating learners to be autonomous. The framework involves sections such as learning independently, learning from new situations, and acting to improve future learning.

On the other hand, studies show that Omani students lack learning autonomy and motivation to learn due to poor daily interactions and poor teaching methods (Borg & Al-Busaidi,

2012; Al-Mahrooqi 2012). Moreover, Al-Mekhlafi and Nagartnam (2017) argue that data collected from classrooms in the Arabian Gulf area shows a gap between theory and practice regarding student-centered learning.

Therefore, a detailed investigation is needed to reveal the actual perceptions of students in their early stages about their learning autonomy. The findings of Borg and Al-Busaidi's (2012) study encourage the researcher to investigate the perceptions of cycle two's students towards learning autonomy. Learning to learn competencies are used to explore how autonomous they are. It seems more logical to investigate autonomy in the early stages of education. Therefore, cycle two students' autonomy will be investigated using three main areas in learning to learn competencies: (1) skills and strategies for participating in learning, (2) taking control of own learning, and (3) reflecting on and evaluating own learning success.

Due to the shortage of studies investigating learning autonomy in cycle two schools in Oman, this study is an attempt to explore Omani students' learning autonomy for two reasons. Firstly, the theoretical background of this study aims to provice a better understanding of students' perceptions of their learning autonomy in this stage. The findings of this research will hopefully generate more precise data, providing a guideline for developing an English language curriculum, materials related to teaching and learning, classroom activities, and teacher training to meet autonomous learning requirements. Secondly, such a study is currently needed by Omani English teachers, because its findings reveal students' perceptions about their learning skills and strategies, the ability to take control, and the ability to reflect and evaluate so that teachers can develop an autonomous environment for their students in schools. Also, teachers can use the findings to modify their teaching plans by deliberately embedding learning to learn competencies in their daily classroom activities. This study focuses on the following research questions:

1. What is the perception of cycle two students towards their skills and strategies for learning?
2. What is the perception of cycle two students towards taking control of their learning?
3. What is the perception of cycle two students toward their ability to reflect and evaluate their learning?

4. What are the perceptions of cycle two teachers regarding students' skills and strategies, taking control of their learning, and their ability to reflect and evaluate their learning?

The primary purpose of this study is to investigate cycle two students' learning autonomy by measuring the level of learning to learn competencies. To achieve the study's primary goal, three main learning areas were examined. The first area identified practical skills that Omani students have. The second area investigated Omani learners' ability to take control of their learning. The last area studied the ability of Omani students in reflecting and evaluating their learning.

1. Competences: A combination of knowledge, skills, and attitudes (Council of the European Union, 2018).
2. Learning autonomy: The ability to observe and participate in new experience and incorporate new knowledge into existing knowledge, modifying the latter where necessary" (Council of Europe 2001).
3. Learning to learn competencies: The ability to pursue and persist in learning, to organize one's own learning, and effectively manage time and information" (European Framework, 2006).
4. Can-do statements: Descriptions of a skill or an ability that learners should be able to perform competently by the end of that stage of the learning journey (Cambridge University, 2019).
5. Cycle two schools: Schools in Oman that consist of classes from grade five to grade nine.

II. LITERATURE REVIEWS

2.1. Learning Autonomy

The concept of Learning Autonomy (LA) has been widely discussed in the educational field and significant efforts have been made to define it and explore its effectiveness in learning. Different concepts of LA appear in the literature. According to Al-Busaidi and Al-Mamari (2014), the differences in concept depend "on the writer and the context where the term is used" (p. 2051). A widely cited definition of learning autonomy by Holec (1981) postulates that it is the " ability to take charge of one's learning," which is considered a broad definition of LA. A decade after Holec's definition, Little (1991) considered LA to be "a matter of the learning psychological relation to the process and content of learning. It is to be found in a wide variety of behaviors as a capacity for detachment, critical reflection, decision-making and independent action" (p.4). Littlewood (1996) suggests that LA is the "learners' ability and willingness to make choices independently" (p.79). In his definition, Littlewood combines a willingness to the ability that Holec proposed in 1981. Benson (2001) considers LA "the capacity to take control of one's learning" (p.47). He justifies that it is "a capacity because various kinds of abilities can be involved in control over learning… the most important abilities are those that allow learners to plan their learning activities, monitor their progress and evaluate their outcomes" (Benson, 2003, p. 290).

Therefore, autonomous learners who are skillful and responsible for their own learning process are a major concern in the realm of ELT around the world and have attracted practitioners around the globe to explore it in more depth. Pichailuck and Luksaneeyanawin (2015) investigated the perception of 30 young rural EFL students' perceptions of learning autonomy in Thailand through questionnaires and interviews. The study's findings show that the learners are motivated and willing to adopt LA but they are unaware of its practices. It is worth noticing that the limited number of participants in this study makes it difficult to generalize its findings to all rural students. Another study that examines the costs and benefits of LA was conducted by Wielenga-Meijer et al. (2011). It aims to investigate three levels of autonomy: no level, moderated level, and complete level. The participants were 95 college students in the Netherlands exposed to an experimental study. The findings show that a moderated level of autonomy fosters motivation and promotes the participants' exploration behavior. However, the results show that a complete level of autonomy can be harmful and insufficient to the learning process. The researchers suggest a "sufficient autonomy" which means not too much and not too little. But this raises the question: what determines sufficient autonomy? It is not stated in the discussion section of this study. Additionally, the study does not suggest any guidelines for adequate autonomy. In addition, the nature of the single task "Tom and Jerry" that was used in this experiment might have led to this conclusion. Yalderim (2008) carried out a study that aimed to examine the readiness of EFL learners for learning autonomy at Turkish University. 103 participants in this survey responded to a forty-three-item questionnaire. The findings of this study show that students believe in sharing responsibility with the teachers over their learning process. They also perceive themselves as autonomous learners and have positive attitudes towards their abilities to be autonomous. This study would have been more helpful if it focused on the role of the books and study materials than just emphasizing the part of the teachers to involve students more in the learning process. Javid (2018) investigated the perceptions of 60 English language teachers in Taif in Saudi Arabia Universities about the factors affecting students' autonomy. The findings of this study revealed that study materials, teachers, and technology play essential roles in promoting learning autonomy.

Based on a review of the literature, LA is effective in language learning as it promotes language learners' motivation (Dickinson, 1995) and effective learning (Benson, 2001) that directly contributes to a long-life learning.

2.2 Learning to Learn Competencies

It is essential to clarify learning to learn competencies by identifying the relationship between learning to learn competencies and LA. Learning to learn competencies are considered the method that can achieve autonomous learning. These competencies are a mixture of knowledge, skills, dispositions, attitudes, and values to scaffold an individual's involvement in the learning process. One definition commonly used in recent studies defines learning to learn as "The ability

to pursue and persist in learning, to organize one's own learning, including through effective management of time and information ... This competence includes awareness of one's learning process and needs, identifying available opportunities" (Education Council, 2006 p. 26).

This comprehensive definition includes skills, values, knowledge, dispositions, attitudes and combines them with self-awareness and self-regulation of the learning process. It also includes motivation and confidence to achieve learning to learn competencies.

Similarly, Stringer (2006) has proposed another definition that includes many concepts such as "metacognition, socio-cognitive skills, assessment, and lifelong learning." On the other hand, Hofmann (2006) suggests a minimal definition for learning to learn by describing it as a "method-in-action," suggesting that learners need to acquire learning to learn competencies. In fact, it is a very narrow definition that considers only the means while neglecting learners' motivation and cognition. Another definition proposed that learning to learn "allows people to be more effective, flexible and self-organized learners in a variety of contexts" (Candy, 1990, p. 30). Learning to learn competencies are considered to empower learners with "motivation, autonomy, and responsibility to control their own learning" (Hoskins and Crick, 2008, p. 22). Finally, the acquisition of learning to learn competencies has many benefits. First, they lead to "international learning" and increase learning autonomy (Black, 2006, p. 119). Additionally, Hofmann (2006) explained that learning to learn is essential for learners in the twenty-first century because learners need to be equipped with skills to support them in dealing with the accelerated pace of learning in all aspects of an individual's life.

The definitions of learning autonomy and learning to learn competencies are interrelated. Huttunen (1996) considers learning autonomy as the outcome of learning to learn competencies. In other words, supporting students with different strategies and techniques that enable them to be more aware of their learning process makes them efficient and autonomous learners. Therefore, learners will have the chance to choose the best strategies that meet their interests and learning styles. Once students have established the strategies that help them study appropriately, they will pursue learning independently. These accommodative strategies prepare them to learn autonomously in schools and beyond (Herescu, 2019).

The Cambridge Life Competencies Framework adapted in this study establishes three key competencies that students need to acquire at the primary level to become autonomous learners. The first one refers to students' skills and strategies for learning in the primary class. It includes subskills as:

1. Engage in directed activities;
2. Use effective systems for finding information;
3. Use effective strategies for learning and retaining information;
4. Use effective strategies for comprehension and production.

For example, students' participation in learning may be to take notes in order to store and retrieve information. There are many techniques and strategies for taking notes, and students need to investigate and choose the one which best suits their own personal style, needs, and resources (Herescu, 2019).

The second learning to learn competency to become autonomous learners is taking control of their own learning. It includes four subskills:

1. Set goals and plan for learning;
2. Take initiative to improve own learning;
3. Manage the learning environment;
4. Manage attitudes and emotions.

For students to take control over their learning, they need to be helped to promote self-management strategies, keep their motivation at a high level, focus on the task during class, and avoid distractions to achieve the best results. Therefore, for learners to achieve self-regulation, they need to have specific learning goals (Herescu, 2019, p. 2).

The third learning to learn competency that students need to become autonomous is reflecting on and evaluating their own learning success. For students to be able to reflect and assess their learning at the primary level they need to:

1. Keep track of progress;
2. Evaluate learning and improvement;
3. Use feedback to improve learning.

Students are motivated to reflect on their own learning to assess their success and failure in their tasks. Continuous reflection can lead to an evaluation, which helps inform decisions like continuing or modifying the learning process. Enabling students with evaluation skills will help them identify and "use learning techniques and strategies which work for them, depending on the context, the learning goal, and the learner's characteristics." (Herescu, 2019).

Many studies show the effectiveness of learning to learn competencies in education. Moreno and Martín (2007) conducted a systematic review that aimed to analyze the projects in Spain about learning to learn competencies. The result showed that students did not have the background knowledge of learning to learn, and what they had learned was far from what this review suggested as ideal. Also, the theoretical relevance associated with learning to learn competence has no evidence in educational reform focused on strategic learning. The review recommended that the main activities in the textbooks and curriculum materials should direct students towards "using reading and writing in their epistemic dimension, processing information in a way that allows them to convert it into knowledge, reflecting on their learning, identifying what they do that allows them to learn more, building a representation of themselves as apprentices that makes them feel competent and wish to continue learning." Hoskins and Crick's (2010) article analyzed the European Education Council Framework of critical competencies. They found that learning to learn is essential for social success, establishes necessary implications for educational systems, and

provides opportunities for lifelong learning. The evidence in this article showed that learning to learn competencies are required to succeed in actual life tasks. The value of learning to learn is found in using it as a basis for active learning and long-life learning. Besides, the evidence suggests that academic success is correlated with learning to learn and learning to learn enables students to actively pursue any necessary learning opportunities (Hoskins & Crick, 2010). In detailed studies concerning speaking proficiency and self-regulation, Tavallali and Marzban (2015) explored self-regulatory strategies' effect on learning autonomy. The participants in this study were 40 Iranian EFL students aged 18-20 attending speaking courses. This study used two instruments to collect data: the learning autonomy questionnaire and the self-regulatory questionnaire were administered two months after the treatment. The study's findings showed that the participants in the experimental group were more autonomous than the participants in the control group. There was no significant relationship between participants' learning autonomy and self-regulatory strategies due to the short exposure to the strategy and lack of time to practice the self-regulatory strategy. However, the participants in the experimental group used a self-regulatory technique more frequently than the control group.

In the Omani context, scant studies have been conducted on English as Foreign Language (EFL) to investigate the views of English language teachers and learners about learning autonomy. Al-Sadi (2015) used a reflective group conversation with 15 post-foundation Omani undergraduate students to explore how Omani students view their roles in language learning and how their definitions might link to their behavior in and outside the classroom. One of his key findings showed that Omani learners appear to be metacognitively aware of their role in language learning. However, their autonomy is conditioned to their needs, schedule, and environment. On the other hand, Borg and Al-Busaidi (2012) examined 61 teachers' opinions of Omani students' autonomy in higher education. A closed-ended questionnaire was distributed to collect the data, and a descriptive analysis was used to present the findings. The findings have demonstrated that Omani students' lack of motivation to learn, lack of teachers' encouragement, and heavy curricular load have negatively influenced the presence of LA among Omani Learners.

These studies explored learners' and teachers' views in higher education institutions while highly neglecting younger students. Some scholars have considered LA a prerequisite for higher education and have required learning to learn competencies from early stages in education. This study will crystalize how cycle two students and teachers view learning autonomy by investigating their perceptions regarding learning-to-learn competencies.

III. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Participants

The population of this study is all grade nine students in Oman. Grade nine is considered the last stage in cycle two; therefore, the learning to learn can-do statements used to measure the learning autonomy at each level assume that students developed the skills at a previous stage of learning. A total number of 383 students were involved in this study. All the students are 13- 14 years old.

The focused group interview included four female English teachers who taught grade nine during the academic year 2021-2022.Their experience ranged from 13-16 years.

3.2. Research Design

This study utilized a mixed-method research design to investigate the perceptions of grade nine students in Oman through a face-to-face questionnaire in the classrooms and Google Forms. Also, it aimed to collect qualitative data through focused group interviews to explore EFL teachers' perceptions about learning autonomy.

3.3. Research Instruments

3.3.1 Questionnaire

The questionnaire was adapted by the author of this study to explore the perception of grade nine students regarding their learning autonomy. It consisted of three main parts. The first part contained ten items which examined participants' perceptions about their skills and strategies for participating in learning. The second part consisted of five items measuring participants' views towards their ability to control their own learning. The third part contained six items measuring participants' views about their abilities to reflect and evaluate their own learning. Responses were measured on a 3-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (rarely) to 3 (usually).

3.3.2. Focus Group Interviews

Two focus group interviews were conducted to explore cycle two's EFL teachers' perceptions of cycle two students' learning autonomy and gain a deep understanding of cycle two students' learning autonomy. The interviews were conducted through Google Meet; they were recorded and transcribed. The same learning to learn competencies statements were used in the discussions. The interview consisted of three main stages: 1) ranking the statements from one to ten (one being high and ten being low) from the teachers' point of view, 2) justifying their ranking, and 3) giving examples from the field to support their reasoning. The interviews had closed questions and open-ended questions, making the interviews more comprehensive, and it allowed the researcher to examine the topic in depth. In the closed questions, the participants were asked to rank the statements in each part from high to low according to their points of view. In the open-ended questions, the participants were asked for justifications for their ranking. They provide the reasons for their high and low perceptions and the factors that might promote and hinder cycle two learning autonomy.

3.3.3. Validity and Reliability of the Questionnaire

To ensure the instrument's validity, a copy of the questionnaire was sent to four experts from the Higher College of Technology in Oman and six teachers who were teaching in cycle two schools to check it in terms of clarity and relevance to the

purpose of the study. Their recommendations and evaluations were considered a priority for amendments. After checking validity, the questionnaire was translated into Arabic to avoid misunderstanding on the part of students. After that, the same experts checked the English and Arabic versions for validity.

For reliability of the instrument of this study, the questionnaire was piloted to fifty students in grade nine to anticipate any possible obstacles that might occur in the administration process. Cronbach's alpha coefficient was calculated to check the internal consistency. It was .884.

The data collection process took around two months to be completed. It started on 5th October 2021 and ended on 3rd December 2021. There were two ways of collecting data: random sampling face to face in nearby schools and convenient sampling through Google Forms for far away schools.

3.3.4. Validity and Reliability of the Focused Groups' Interviews' Questions

Two experts from the college of education validated the focus group interview questions, and their recommendations and amendments were considered.

IV. RESULT

Analyses highlighted the most and least perceived learning-to-learn competencies from grade nine students and EFL teachers in the Omani schools. Descriptive statistics (means and standard deviations) were first written for the three dimensions in general and then for the specific items under each dimension. The questionnaires were tabulated and analyzed using the Software Package for the Social Science (SPSS). The result section is organized according to the four research questions in this study which are stated as follows:

1. What are the perceptions of grade nine students toward their learning skills and strategies?
2. What are the perceptions of grade nine students towards their ability to take control of their own learning?
3. What are the perceptions of grade nine students towards their ability to reflect and assess their own learning?
4. What are the perceptions of cycle two EFL teachers regarding students' learning skills and strategies, taking control of their learning, and reflecting and assessing their own learning?

This section will show the general three dimensions of the study, and they will be presented first according to their means and standard deviations.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics for Learning Skills and Strategies, Taking Control of Own Learning and Reflecting and Assessing their Learning (N =383)

Study dimensions	M	SD
1- Skills and strategies for learning	22.53	4.709
2- Taking control of own learning	11.32	2.487
3- Reflecting and evaluating own learning	13.65	3.124

An analysis of participants' perceptions towards learning skills and strategies, taking control of own learning, and reflecting and assessing their learning is illustrated in Table 1. Overall, the participants perceived themselves as having moderated abilities to obtain learning skills ($M = 22.53$, $SD = 4.709$), moderated abilities to take control of learning ($M = 11.32$, $SD = 2.487$), and moderated abilities to reflect and evaluate their Learning ($M = 13.65$, $SD = 3.124$).

To answer the question "What are the perceptions of grade nine students towards their learning skills and strategies?", an analysis of participants' perceptions towards learning skills is illustrated in Table 2. Generally, the participants tended to have moderated abilities to obtain learning skills and strategies ($M = 22.53$, $SD = 4.709$). The participants had high perceptions of using effective strategies in finding information ($M = 2.60$, $SD = .679$). In contrast, they had moderated abilities towards using effective comprehension strategies such as using context to guess the meaning of unfamiliar words ($M = 1.81$, $SD = .712$). The participants reported no low perceptions regarding their learning skills and strategies.

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics for Participants' Perceptions towards Learning Skills and Strategies (N =182)

Statements	Mean	Standard deviation	Rank
1. I can complete tasks in class as required.	2.35	.771	3
2. I can work with my classmates in group to complete activities.	2.48	.762	2
3. I can appropriately record new vocabulary (e.g. in a vocabulary notebook or in vocabulary flashcards).	2.27	.813	6
4. I can use context to guess the meaning of unfamiliar words.	1.81	.712	9
5. I can search for information on specific topics when doing a project independently.	2.60	.679	1
6. I can note down key information while reading and listening.	2.15	.819	8
7. I can summarize information on a selected topic when doing a project.	2.16	.855	7
8. I can organize the information I write in my notes (either digitally or on paper) for future use.	2.24	.824	5
9. I can follow a storyline through observing visuals.	2.30	.810	4
10. I can produce short texts through participating in guided or shared writing activities.	2.15	.837	8

Table 3 shows the answer to the question "What are the perceptions of grade nine students towards taking control of their learning?" Overall, the participants seemed to have moderated abilities to take control of their own learning (M = 11.32, SD = 2.487). The participants reported high abilities of managing the learning environment (M = 2.42, SD = .754) but moderated abilities in taking the initiative to improve their learning (M = 1.96, SD = .857). None of the samples regarded themselves as having low abilities to take control of their own learning.

Table 3. Descriptive Statistics for Participants' Perceptions towards their Ability to Take control of own Learning (N =383)

Statements	Mean	Standard deviation	Rank
1. I can listen attentively and manage distractions.	2.37	.755	2
2. I can devise ways to practice English outside the classroom (e.g., watching clips/ TV/ films in English, using English in social media, reading stories/ magazines in English)	1.96	.857	5
3. I can work productively with other students without becoming distracted in class.	2.42	.754	1
4. I can ask my classmates for help when learning.	2.25	.870	4
5. I can employ skills and strategies for learning independently in completing a task.	2.32	.766	3

To answer the question "What are the perceptions of grade nine students toward their ability to reflect and evaluate their learning?", an analysis of participants' perceptions towards their ability to reflect and evaluate their own learning is presented in Table 4. Overall, the participants tended to have moderated perceptions of their ability to reflect and assess their learning ($M = 13.65$, $SD = 3.124$). The participants reported having high perceptions of their ability to work collaboratively and benefit from input ($M = 2.56$, $SD = .706$). However, participants reported least ability keeping track of their progress in learning ($M = 2.07$, $SD = .825$) and using feedback to improve learning ($M = 2.07$, $SD = .814$). None of the participants perceived themselves to have a low ability to reflect and evaluate their learning.

Table 4. Descriptive Statistics for Participants' Perceptions towards their Ability to Reflect and Evaluate own Learning (N =383)

Statements	Mean	Standard deviation	Rank
1. I can evaluate how well I am progressing in learning English.	2.07	.825	5
2. I can show awareness of my progress in learning English (e.g., reflecting on what went well in class).	2.10	.849	4
3. I can listen and respond positively to feedback and understand why a correction was given.	2.07	.814	5
4. I can learn from mistakes and feedback.	2.45	.746	2
5. I can correct myself after making mistakes.	2.40	.775	3
6. I can work collaboratively with other classmates and benefit from their input.	2.56	.706	1

To answer the question "What are the perceptions of cycle two EFL teachers regarding students' skills and strategies, taking control of their learning, and their ability to reflect and evaluate their learning?", two focus group interviews were conducted to gain a deeper understanding of teachers' perceptions towards learning autonomy. The findings are presented in the following tables to show the ranking of learning to learn competencies from teachers' perceptions regarding students' learning skills and strategies, students' ability to control their learning, and students' abilities to reflect and assess their learning. Also, thematic analysis was used to justify teachers ranking from their perceptions.

Table 5 presents descriptive statistics for teachers' ranking regarding students' learning skills and strategies. The teachers believed that grade nine students could work in groups or pairs effectively if the teachers assigned roles for the groups and provided clear instructions and models. Similarly, the teachers thought that students could engage in directed classroom activities under the teachers' supervision. Teacher C commented, "I usually use shared writing with my students, and they can produce excellent writing pieces." Moreover, regarding using effective strategies to support learning, the teachers believed that students are in their early stages of recording vocabulary and making glossaries to support their learning.

On the other hand, teachers agreed that grade nine students needed to acquire the necessary skills to find, summarize and organize information. Teacher A commented that "Finding and summarizing information is a far stage that my students cannot reach this year." Moreover, teacher B added, "Students can write the topic in Google only, but they cannot get and use the information they found."

Table 5. Descriptive Statistics for Teachers' Perceptions Regarding Learning Skills and Strategies (N =6)

Statements	Mean	Standard Deviation	Rank
1.Cycle two students can complete tasks in class as required.	7.75	1.258	2
2.Cycle two students can work with their classmates in groups to complete activities.	9.50	.557	1
3. Cycle two students can appropriately record new vocabulary (e.g., in a vocabulary notebook or vocabulary flashcards).	5.50	3.109	5
4. Cycle two students can use context to guess the meaning of unfamiliar words.	3.50	.577	7
5. Cycle two students can search for information on specific topics when doing a project independently.	3.50	2.646	7
6.Cycle two students can note down key information while reading and listening.	4.75	1.893	6
7.Cycle two students can summarize information on a selected topic when doing a project.	2.75	2.217	9
8. Cycle two students can organize the information they write in their notes (either digitally or on paper) for future use.	3.25	3.304	8
9. Cycle two students can follow a storyline through observing visuals.	7.25	1.708	3
10.Cycle two students can produce short texts through participating in guided or shared writing activities.	6.50	3.317	4

Table 6 shows descriptive statistics for teachers' ranking regarding students' ability to take control of their learning. The findings in this dimension showed that teachers believed that grade nine students could take the initiative to improve their own learning by asking classmates for help. All teachers agreed that it is common for grade nine students to ask each other when they need help in their learning. Teacher B mentioned that "I noticed that students asked their classmates frequently for clarifications if they were working in pairs or individually. They felt more comfortable asking their classmates than asking their teachers." The teachers believed that students could work productively in class, yet all teachers agreed that students were "easily distracted in class" and "attentive students were rare." However, the teachers believed that few students could devise ways to learn English outside the classroom. As Teacher B added, "Only those who are outstanding and have linguistic skills are enjoying learning English outside the class."

Table 6. Descriptive Statistics for Teachers' Perceptions Regarding Students' Ability to Take Control of their Learning (N =6)

Statements	Mean	Standard Deviation	Rank
1.Cycle two students can listen attentively and manage distraction.	2.25	1.258	3
2. Cycle two students can devise ways to practice English outside the classroom (e.g. watching clips/ TV/ films in English, using English on social media, reading stories/ magazines in English)	1.75	.957	4
3. Cycle two students can work productively with other students without becoming distracted in class.	3.75	.500	2
4. Cycle two students can ask their classmates for help when learning.	5.00	.000	1
5. Cycle two students can employ skills and strategies for learning independently in completing a task.	2.25	.957	3

Table 7 presents descriptive statistics for teachers' ranking regarding students' ability to reflect and assess their learning. The teachers thought that grade nine students could work collaboratively and benefit from each other's feedback. On the other hand, the teachers agreed that students could not use feedback to improve learning because they could not correct themselves unless the teachers directed them and pointed their mistakes out. For example, in a writing activity, teachers needed to show where the errors were, and almost half of the students would correct themselves. Teacher B added that for students to learn from mistakes and feedback, teachers need to point out common errors, such as using two subjects, and repeating that correction over time in order for students to learn. However, teacher C argued that her "students always sought reasons behind wrong answers, and they always compared their wrong answers with their classmates' answers to identify the differences." The teachers assumed that students could not keep track of their progress. The teachers justified that their students could not evaluate their progress in learning English because they did not provide them with opportunities to evaluate and assess their progress in learning English. At this level, the teachers believed that they should assess students' progress in learning.

Moreover, the teachers believed that grade nine students did not have the awareness to judge their performance in English. Teacher D provided an example from her experience with grade nine, "Students judged their performance in learning English using the exam results. Yet, they were progressing in vocabulary and skimming and scanning, but they were not aware of this progress."

Table 7. Descriptive Statistics for Teachers' Perceptions Regarding Students' Ability to Reflect and Evaluate their Learning (N =6)

Statements	Mean	Standard Deviation	Rank
1.Cycle two students can evaluate how well they are progressing in learning English.	1.25	.500	5
2.Cycle two students can show awareness of their progress in learning English (e.g. by reflecting on what went well on class).	1.75	.500	4
3.Cycle two students can listen and respond positively to feedback and understand why a correction is given.	4.75	.957	2
4.Cycle two students can learn from mistakes and feedback.	3.00	.000	3
5.Cycle two students can correct themselves after making mistakes.	1.75	.500	4
6.Cycle two students can work collaboratively with other classmates and benefit from their input.	5.50	.577	1

Finally, from the teachers' point of view, the outstanding students in grade nine developed learning skills and strategies. They witnessed students' success in learning English by using learning strategies. As a result, the teachers proposed using task-based learning to enhance learning skills and techniques because it required students to employ learning strategies; therefore, teachers believed that skills and strategies could be taught with language skills. Additionally, the teachers suggested collaborative work to improve students' autonomy.

V. DISCUSSION

To the best of the researcher's knowledge, this is the first study that has explored the learning-to-learn competencies of grade nine students in Oman. The primary aim of this study is to investigate the perception of grade nine students and EFL cycle two teachers in the Omani cycle two schools about their LA through exploring learning-to-learn competencies. The study aims to explore three areas: learning skills and strategies, the ability to take control of learning, and the ability to reflect and evaluate learning.

The findings regarding learning skills and strategies show that grade nine students had moderated perceptions of their practical skills and strategies that enable them to be autonomous. Students believed in their skills in finding information for their projects, while EFL teachers believed the opposite. Students held low perceptions of using effective strategies for comprehension, and teachers thought that

students were in their early stages of acquiring skills and strategies for learning.

Furthermore, the findings of this study reported that grade nine students held moderated beliefs about taking control of their own learning to become autonomous learners. The only item that showed high perception in this dimension is managing the learning environment "I can work productively with other students without becoming distracted in class." At the same time, "I can devise ways to practice English outside the classroom (e.g., watching clips/ TV/ films in English, using English on social media, reading stories/ magazines in English) scored the least from the students' and teachers' perceptions in this area. On the other hand, teachers believed that students could perform well in directed activities such as shared writing, yet they can be easily distracted from the activities.

In the third dimension, the results revealed that grade nine students believed they had moderated views towards their ability to reflect and evaluate their learning. Grade nine students and cycle two teachers believed in students' ability to work collaboratively in groups and benefit from the input. In contrast, they seemed to have the least confidence in the area of using feedback to improve learning and keep track of progress in learning. Finally, a common observation among all three areas is that both teachers and students believed in students' ability to work with their classmates in groups and benefit from each other.

The findings of this study are supported by the results of Al-Humaidi (2015) and Yalderim (2008). Reviewing the relevant literature in the Omani context, the findings regarding students' perceptions of this study are supported to some degree by the results of the survey conducted by Al-Sadi (2015). Additionally, the findings of this study supported teachers' opinions about Omani students' LA (Borg & Al-Busaidi 2012). However, Borg and Al-Busaidi's (2012) findings contradict this study's student perceptions. The contradiction might occur due to the different modes of teaching in the two studies: face-to-face teaching and online teaching. During the course of this study, which happened in the academic year 2021-2022, the school system has implemented blended learning and teaching as a teaching mode. Therefore, the nature of interactions between teachers and students and between students and course materials has changed. This change may enable students to play a more significant role in their learning process.

There are several explanations for the moderated perceptions of grade nine students towards their learning-to-learn competencies. First, this year's and last year's circumstances allow students to experience a different learning type and not depend entirely on their coursebook and teachers. The findings of Javid (2018) suggest that to enhance students' autonomy, textbooks should be equipped with multimedia resources to help students practice the language outside the classroom by themselves, and teachers should use appropriate technology and direct students to use it. Moreover, students can interact with content in asynchronous classes autonomously and live broadcasting lessons through TV channels and educational videos. In these classes, teachers prepare videos, presentations, interactive content, and worksheets to learn by themselves. It is a chance for students to interact with content without teachers directly controlling the learning process and choosing when to study. Another explanation is that students utilize technology to support their learning, and they use it as a source of learning. Therefore, learning responsibilities are shifting from teacher-centered instruction to a student-centered approach. Students have a variety of content related to their curriculum; therefore, they must assess what they need and what might interests them and choose accordingly. Finally, the students are given a chance to evaluate their learning after each unit in the English subject. After each lesson, the use of can-do-statements in math and science classes might have helped promote self-assessment skills.

To sum it up, the results of this study showed that grade nine students in Oman have moderated perceptions of their learning skills and strategies, taking control of their own learning and reflecting on and assessing their learning. On the other hand, students and teachers strongly believed in working in groups with their classmates.

VI. CONCLUSION

This study aimed to explore grade nine students' and EFL cycle two teachers' perceptions of their LA by investigating three main areas: learning skills, the ability to take control of learning, and reflecting and evaluating learning. The quantitative data analysis of the learning autonomy questionnaire indicated that grade nine students held moderated beliefs in their learning skills, ability to take control of their learning, and the ability to reflect and evaluate their learning. However, the teachers believed that students need to be trained and directed to acquire learning to learn competencies. This research is a small step toward investigating Omani students' and teachers' perceptions of LA in cycle two schools as it reveals students' and teachers' beliefs about LA. This study also contributes to the body of knowledge about LA in cycle two schools since there is a shortage in the literature in this field.

VII. LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

This study is limited as it used convenient sampling when distributing the questionnaires through Google Forms. Furthermore, this study explored only the views of female EFL Omani teachers in the focus group interviews while male and non-Omani EFL teachers were not sampled. Finally, the study depended on two instruments: the students' questionnaire and the teachers' focused group interviews. At the same time, other sources such as observations and document analysis were not used in this study.

VIII. RECOMMENDATIONS

This study shows students' readiness for LA; therefore, students should be taught learning strategies in acquiring reading, writing, listening, and speaking. Moreover, throughout the academic year, students should be provided with different sources to scaffold their curriculum. They should be given a chance to select the sources that meet their needs and interest.

Furthermore, the role of groups must be activated, and more group work must be assigned to appeal to students' interests and promote communication and learning skills. Finally, technology should be an essential part of students' language learning to practice their autonomy.

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