

A Critical Overview of Designing and Conducting Focus Group Interviews in Applied Linguistics Research

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Abstract This paper explored the processes of carrying out, analysing, and reporting qualitative focus group interviews in research pertaining to applied linguistics and language-related disciplines. Interviews are normally used as retrospective tools to elaborate the responses of informants in quantitative surveys with no role for exploring new aspects of beliefs and attitudes that are not included in a survey. This paper hypothesises that interviews have different natures and they can be used as preliminary research tools for exploring new areas of students' beliefs and linguistic background and meanwhile can assist in devising questionnaire items for subsequent wider use. This non-positivist perspective reduces the role of the researcher in directing the pathway of intended research and allows the informants the opportunity to be the primary sources that feed the questionnaire with their ideas. The research reported in this paper is a part of a large-scale study which investigates students' beliefs about autonomy in learning English language. Focus group interviews are applied to understand aspects of autonomy as represented by students, and to feed a questionnaire with ample ideas for devising its items. This movement allows for investigating students' beliefs from an emic view; that is from the insiders' themselves. Summarising the key features of implementing focus group interviews, the significance of this paper resides in making the complex process of carrying out focus group interviews accessible to all researchers. Gradually, it shows how the principles and conventions of qualitative research are realised in applied linguistics. At a deeper level, it discusses how ethical and validity measures are maintained and the optimal ways of analysing the given data. This paper proposes that interviews can be used as an independent research tool as they represent different settings and can enhance research with new perspectives which a closed-ended questionnaire may not reveal.

Keywords: *learner autonomy, students' beliefs, focus group interviews, transcription, thematic analysis*

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1. Introduction

According to [6], a major binding feature of qualitative research is its opposition to positivism, which represents the philosophical basis and ontology of quantitative research. Using individual interviews and Focus group Interviews (FGIs) in applied linguistics helps to understand the beliefs and conceptions of language learners more clearly due to the many uncontrollable social variables that influence this process. This is because students hold different beliefs about how to learn languages and these beliefs are contextual and are likely to reflect the background knowledge they have about the nature of a target language and the optimal strategies of approaching it [7]. In addition, investigating students' beliefs about autonomy in learning English is rather controversial because each learner has his own philosophy for managing processes of learning English depending on his cognitive abilities, learning styles, and learning opportunities. Accordingly, FGIs help to explore a wide

range of students' beliefs, independent learning practices, and representations of autonomy.

The research explored in this paper is significant for some reasons. Initially, carrying out qualitative enquiry has often been accompanied with some challenges and/or prejudices that make approaching it less likely for novice and less experienced researchers. As outlined by [14], the accusation that qualitative enquiry does not measure up to the more demanding standards of hard or scientific research is a common one. Some researchers accordingly consider qualitative research as a "soft" research. This paper primarily signals the value of qualitative enquiry and the use of FGIs in applied linguistics. Another feature is that one-to-one interviews are getting more popularity over FGIs due to the simplicity and straightforwardness of conducting, analysing, and reporting them. This paper provides a practical step-by-step explication of how FGIs are conducted, how participants are recruited, how a topic guide is devised, and how the results are analysed and reported. This paper, thirdly, provides a clear elaboration of how students' contributions in FGIs are utilised for devising a questionnaire for subsequent wider use.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Nature of Learner Autonomy

From a social constructivist perspective, promoting learner autonomy in language learning gained prominence in the last two decades due to the development in learning traditions which view students' agency and independence as crucial for enhancing language performance [6]. It is also due to a parallel improvement in theories of learning which view students as not blank slates but who have cognitive abilities and background knowledge upon which they can scaffold new concepts through interaction with mediated social artefacts. It is moreover owing to a concurrent development in teaching methodologies that shift from didactic techniques where teachers hold the reins of instruction to dialectical ones where students are inseparable parts of the learning process. This interest furthermore is owing to development in the philosophy of learning that assert the autonomy of students and the importance of liberating their thinking from the invisible walls built around them [9]. This liberatory is not only in the sense of self-development but in the sense of a questioning the nature of education and a search for alternative forms of knowledge and action.

Following on from these principles to explaining what learner autonomy actually is, [12] argues that autonomy refers to "capacity of thinking and acting independently that may occur in any kind of situation including, of course, a situation where the focus is on learning". In language education, this takes different forms and degrees according to certain personal, psychological factors as well as social, educational elements that influence expressing and practising it. References [1] and [2] define autonomy as an indication of students' ability to manage language learning processes with notable skill and volition. This ability is never absolute; it has different degrees influenced by significance of learning goals, available alternatives, and opportunities for independent learning. References [11] and [3] support this viewpoint because it puts autonomy in its wider form that can be found in any setting, within any learner, and within any learning situation. An autonomous learner does not work in isolation from others but benefits from his independence for planning and reflecting on learning goals, procedures, and outcomes. He benefits from his interdependence for consolidating what has been learnt. Autonomy then is a multi-faceted construct that takes different forms based on the ability to assume responsibility, make choices, take decisions, and benefit from experiences and knowledge of others [7].

For [16], these interpretations imply that autonomy is not independent of the social and educational features that characterise the setting in which students act. It is rather influenced by the learning context that may underpin or undermine autonomy. This social turn in understanding autonomy indicates that every learner is autonomous in his own sense and he may (not) express his autonomy in presence of others and may not express it in the way expected by others [7]. Investigating students' beliefs about autonomy therefore helps to recognise how they interpret it and how their context can be improved to foster this construct. In this research, FGIs are conducted to understand the perspectives of autonomy as represented

by students themselves, and this paper provides a practical overview of how these beliefs are investigated.

2.2. Characteristics of FGIs

Reference [8] defines FGIs as "a valuable way of gaining insight into shared understandings and beliefs, while still allowing individual differences of opinion to be voiced. They enable participants to hear the views and experiences of their peers, and cause them to reflect back on their own experiences and thoughts". For [9], FGIs are "organised group discussions which are focused around a single theme", and where information about a selected topic can be collected through candid, normal conversation. One of their characteristics is that they have an informal nature which fosters a range of opinions and allows for having a more comprehensive and revealing understanding of a topic [15]. They are favoured when the focus is on eliciting the perceptions, beliefs, attitudes, and ideas of participants about a certain topic for having rich, multi-faceted understanding of its perspectives. FGIs also represent a permissive and non-threatening environment for getting information on a pre-defined area of interest [10]. They allow participants to interact, influence, and get influenced by others as they are in real life [9]. In FGIs, the triggers are set for open discussion in which speech is exchanged by willing participants. In this case, opinions are developed normally through interaction.

In addition, FGIs have some characteristics that make them a viable research instrument. Reference [15] argues that FGIs have "synergism" nature because they allow for getting a wider bank of data through group interaction in remarkably short time. They also have a "snowballing" nature because an initial opinion from one participant can encourage other levels of discussion from other group members. This interactive nature helps researchers to identify the different viewpoints of participants and their attitudes towards the triggers set for discussion. In addition, they have a "stimulation" nature because debatable views usually encourage the interest of participants either to support their views or to refute the ideas given by others. Hence, FGIs do not seek congruence of opinions, but rather help researchers to benefit from diversity of attitudes to have enough understanding of the phenomenon. Moreover, they provide "security" for participants particularly when critical issues are evoked. Opinions are presented as a part of the overall discussion where significance is given to ideas rather than the individuals that hold them. A further merit of FGIs is their "spontaneity" because participants are not pressurised to answer every question, but to provide genuine contribution when they have something to share in discussion. The sections below discuss the stages of designing, conducting, and analysing the FGIs.

3. Methodology of Conducting FGIs

The tenet of this paper is that it provides a practical rather than theoretical overview of what has been done while using FGIs for investigating students' beliefs about autonomy and how the emerging problems were treated. In this research, FGIs were applied in four secondary schools in Abu Dhabi in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) where English is the only foreign language taught in

public (state) schools. Investigating students' beliefs about autonomy in learning English is one step to identify the possibilities of promoting their independence and improve their linguistic competence. In this study, FGIs were conducted to answer these two research questions:

1. What are the beliefs and conceptions of the UAE students of autonomy in learning English language?
2. What are the beliefs and conceptions of the UAE students of the limitations of the learning context and how they affect their autonomy and independence?

3.1. Profile of FGIs Recruited Participants

As proposed by [10], the FGIs should be made of people with certain common characteristics and similar levels of understanding of a topic, hence aiming for homogeneity rather than diversity. Reference [9] argues that FGIs should be made of participants with similar educational levels to allow for free expressing of their views and to avoid having dominant participants whose knowledge of the topic might surpass the others'. In this study, the population covered Grade 12 (G12) students, similar to the "A" Level students in the UK. Recruiting participants from G12 was because they represent the final stage of compulsory education and the teaching materials force them to get involved in independent and challenging activities that prepare them for discovery learning techniques which are the norm in university education. Groups of High Achiever (HA) and Low Achiever (LA) students were then composed. This was done depending on students' grades in English where most HA students had grades over 95%; whereas the grades of LA ones ranged between 60% and 65% since the pass grade in G12 is 60%. It requires noting that having an LA student in English does not mean that this student is necessarily LA in all subjects. There were some students whose overall GPA was reasonable, but their grades in English were not high and vice versa. These issues were less influential since students' grades in English were the basis of choice.

Public schools in the UAE are gender-segregated, and boys and girls are taught in totally separate schools. To include both genders in the discussion, four groups were composed based on the educational level and gender of participants. These groups were Male High-Achiever Focus Group (hereafter M-HA-FG), Female High-Achiever Focus Group (F-HA-FG), Male Low-Achiever Focus Group (M-LA-FG), and Female Low-Achiever Focus Group (F-LA-FG). The size of each group was decided according to the proposition of [10] who argues that the number of participants in each group should be between five and seven for having easy management, smooth interaction, and rich details. The total number of participants in the four FGIs was 24. Before recruiting participants, two points were asserted with English language team leaders in each of the four schools. They were initially informed not to disclose the criteria upon which participants were nominated to the participants themselves so as not to affect their psychology either positively or negatively. While high achievers would be proud of their distinction, low achievers might be reluctant to participate owing to the unfavourable reputation that may create among their classmates. These team leaders were also told not to reveal all the details about the areas of discussion to participants lest they have their views

prepared in advance or to wear a false identity so as to appear more experienced before other group members. In order to satisfy their curiosity, the participants were told that the interviews would be about their techniques of learning English.

3.2. Conduct of FGIs

Reference [9] argues that planning is the most critical phase for successful FGIs as it needs careful consideration of the purpose of the study as well as the users of the information. It is also because accurate planning guides the remainder of the research process. For [9], planning includes refining the purpose of the study, the process of conducting FGIs, and the way the given results are analysed and reported. Setting and defining the goals and purposes of this study, a proposed date was set for each group depending on the expediency of each school schedule and to make sure that the students were present on that day. Before the start of interviews, few minutes were spent with participants in informal talk to establish rapport, deice frozen atmosphere, and create a feeling of comfort necessary for smooth running of interviews. This step was helpful particularly with female participants whose discourse with foreigners was not popular as per the cultural traditions of the society. The conduct of each FGI took around 90 minutes in length depending on degree of students' contributions and interaction. One interview was applied in a week to have an opportunity to evaluate the amount of data provided by each group. This also helped to finish the transcription of each interview, revise the transcript, and have deliberate thinking of the extent to which the pre-set questions were answered thoroughly. This step helped to avoid having the raw data mixed up and/or overlapped.

These FGIs were moderated by the researcher for two reasons. It was firstly because these FGIs were not only semi-structured but also "more or less directive" [10] to keep discussion focused on the core research area. Hence, giving this role to teachers could result in too much but irrelevant data as they might not identify what was exactly required from participants and the type of information sought from them. The participants also were expected to be more conservative in their responses or to respond in a way that presumably pleases their teachers lest they got interrogated on what they said later on. Conversely, moderating interviews enabled the researcher to ask probing questions when more clarification was needed and when critical points were raised.

Before discussion, the ethical issues of explicitness, confidentiality, and anonymity were asserted. The participants were informed that the discussion was about their techniques of learning English, the learning practices they did independently, and the learning resources they favoured more. At this stage, the whole triggers were set in a way that reveals different aspects of students' understanding of autonomy. They were also informed that the interviews would be recorded to have a complete script of their participation necessary for data analysis. To reduce the anxiety of students who were worried that the recordings might be used against them, they were told that their identities were hidden and anonymous. Anonymity was asserted by using pseudonyms. Before discussion, each participant was assigned a number ranging from one

to seven according to the number of participants in each group. While recording, they were told not to use their names or refer to the real names of others, but to announce themselves through numbers by saying “No. three”, for example, before speaking. Besides hiding the identities of participants, this step helped to avoid mixing up the responses.

In order to confirm confidentiality of contributions, the participants were told that their responses would be highly confidential and would be used only for research purposes and no one except the researcher and supervisor would approach them. They were also informed that their responses would not be used as a part of term evaluation and none of their teachers would use the recordings for or against them. These procedures increased the trust and seriousness of participants and created an impression that they “were free to talk and not pressurised to speak or to speak in a specific way” [10]. After explaining these points, the participants were given the informed consent forms to sign their approval to participate in discussion.

3.3. Questions of FGIs

In order to elicit the maximum amount of information from participants, some questions were selected and paraphrased carefully in advance simply because quality answers are directly related to quality questions [9]. Having semi-structured interviews did not mean that the whole discussion ran on randomly; a topic guide was created and predetermined triggers were set. This questioning route helped to have rich discussion of different points from which students’ understanding of autonomy was deducted. The general trend of questions developed in sense from easy to difficult through three types of questioning. Introductory or opening questions were used to introduce the topic and to foster interaction. Students were asked about the types of movies they watch, the types of books they read, and the time they spend in studying English. Even though these questions might seem general and less focused, they showed level of students’ interest to approach English materials outside the classroom. The responses also revealed the trend of their attitudes about learning English and indicated their beliefs about exploring different pathways for enhancing their English independently.

These opening questions were followed by focused key questions. For example, on investigating their beliefs about management of language learning, the participants were asked about the optimal strategies they apply to improve English skills and overcome language problems and how they see the roles of language teachers in this respect. These prompts showed the extent to which students hold different beliefs, working assumptions, and knowledge about language learning and autonomy [16]. In all phases of interviews, key questions were followed by subsidiary questions to invite participants to elaborate on their experience of independent language learning. For instance, they were asked about the extent to which they favour formal, direct instruction and how they like language aspects like grammar, reading, and writing to be taught. These questions encouraged students to narrate the practices they find effectual in learning English. Confirmatory questions were then used to verify a given idea and to seek more details. An example of this was

given when students were asked about the benefits of using different resources. They were subsequently asked about their beliefs about teacher’s role within this richness and fertility of educational resources. Another example was applied when students were asked about how they practise English. One of the techniques they mentioned was in-class participation. They were then asked why they think the classroom is a good place to practise English and what prevents them from using it outside classroom.

The third type of questions was ending questions which helped participants to add more details they find relevant. They also helped them to express their beliefs more explicitly on independent learning and its impact on language development. In addition, they were asked about what they could promote in their students if they were teachers of English. This question expressed their beliefs about the most favourable ways for promoting English language skills from which their beliefs about autonomy could be inferred. Getting information through indirect means was a technique of data collection used by [5] who asked students to write a letter to their friends telling them about the best ways of learning English independently. Using these triggers should not imply that all participants were active at the same level. These interviews showed that the HA students were more responsive and clear in their contributions than the LA ones. It was possibly because they lack ideas about independent learning or because they were less happy to talk about their learning experiences, when these had been less successful.

3.4. Analysing the Results of FGIs

Since FGIs often produce a phenomenal amount of data, [9] proposes that the focus of analysis should be on the key questions that represent the main areas of discussion and that would contribute to answering the primary questions of the study. Reference [9] also argues that the researcher should decide the approach of analysis before initiating the transcription and coding processes. In this study, the data resulting from the FGIs were analysed thematically in order to reflect on the outcomes with more elaboration and discussion of the underlying principles of students’ beliefs. In defining it, [4] argues that “thematic analysis is a method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data. It minimally organises and describes the data set in (rich) detail. However, frequently it goes further than this and interprets various aspects of the research topic”. This explains the popularity this approach is gaining in qualitative data analysis due to the possibility for providing both descriptive and interpretive accounts of emerging data; hence helping to understand students’ beliefs and the individual elements underlying them. In their explanation of what is meant to be a real theme, [4] claims that “a theme captures something important about the data in relation to the research question, and represents some level of patterned response or meaning within the data set” [4]. Extraction of themes should not simply depend on prevalence and repetition of the idea in the data set; it relies on its relevance to the general research topic and research questions for which the data are collected. Reference [4] therefore claims that there are no clear-cut and fixed criteria upon which themes are defined. This process depends on the personal judgement and intuition

of the researcher and the contributions any extracted theme can add to answering research questions.

Within this research, some themes were extracted and organised using the “Template Analysis” (TA) coined by [8] to show the relationship between extracted themes and their codes. Reference [8] describes the TA as “a varied but related group of techniques for thematically organising and analysing textual data. It has a list of codes (templates) representing themes identified in their textual data” [8]. Using this TA helps to frame the codes under their categories and to watch the relationship between themes and their codes. This process allows for getting a structured diagram of nested codes originating from general themes which need to be investigated. Reference [8] defines codes as “labels attached to a section of text to index it as relating to a theme or issue in the data which the researcher has identified as important to his or her interpretation”. Using the TA helps to investigate the perspectives of different groups of staff within a specific context which is the case of this study.

Extraction of the themes was done by defining the codes which represent different aspects of students’ understanding of autonomy. Coding is defined by [13] as marking the segments of data with symbols, descriptive words, or category names. Reference [9] also defines coding as the process of examining the raw qualitative data which will be in the form of words, phrases, or sentences and assigning codes or labels for them. The coding process was done not only depending on the frequent recurrence of statements in the discussion, but also on the significance of these ideas and their relevance to the general research objectives. Defining the codes was done through two processes of “Open Coding” and “Axial Coding” [15]. The open coding was done by marking and highlighting the key words and phrases in the transcript that were significant in explaining students’ beliefs about autonomy. This initial coding showed aspects of beliefs about linguistic strengths and weaknesses, teacher’s duties, strategies for improving language skills, learning styles, motivation, and practice of English. An axial coding process was also done to rearrange the defined codes according to the commonality among them. Relevant codes were grouped under one category like evaluating progress, improving language skills, and preferred mode of learning. In addition, the categories pertaining to one topic were clustered under one theme like “strategies for learning English”. This theme represented an aspect of students’ beliefs about the cognitive and metacognitive strategies they apply to improve English skills independently. However, it needs clarifying that the coding of ideas did not simply rely on the recurrence of certain words in discussion; the discourse in which these words were used determined the codes to which these words were related. For instance, the word “teacher” was repeated in the discussion, but it had different implications and connotations as shown below.

- I think the teacher has the main responsibility because she guides teaching (*Teacher is blamed*).
- The teacher can only guide us to what we can do independently (*Teacher as facilitator*).
- I think a teacher should train us how to use facilities (*Teacher as resource and trainer*).
- I looked for a personal tutor to teach me grammar rules (*The teacher as provider of data*).

The above examples could illustrate that the coding of ideas depended not only on the repetition of words in students’ discourse but also on the context in which these words were mentioned [10]. This also indicated that constructing the theme started from the bottom; that is from the codes and categories representing the particular ideas students had about autonomy in language learning. The figure below shows how the codes led to the development of categories and the general theme. This figure signals how the coding of themes shifted from the real practices of students in their contexts to the abstract and more general conceptions underlying their activities.

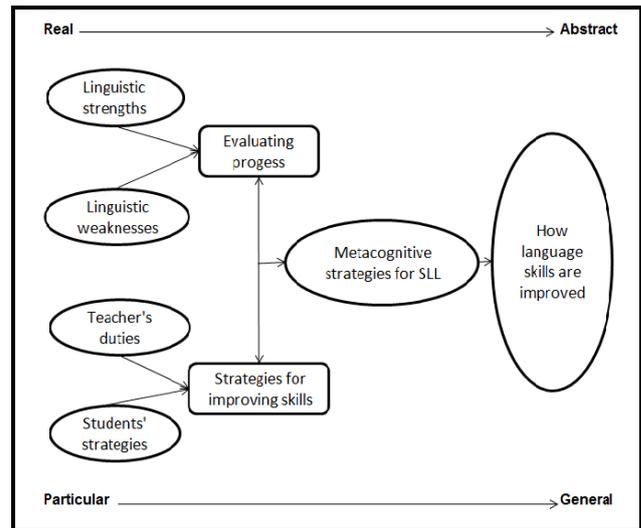


Figure 1. A streamlined codes-to-theory model for qualitative enquiry

In order to avoid bias that might creep through the process of labelling the codes and themes, [4] suggests two ways to maintain validity of making sense of interview data. The first is to ask another colleague with expertise to read through the transcripts and to identify a category system. The categories generated in this way can be compared with the researcher’s own categories and to find the extent to which they are similar. The second way is to ask some participants in these interviews to read the transcripts and to jot down what they see as the main points of the collected data. Because secondary-school students might not have the enough experience to decide what can be considered as a significant code, another researcher in applied linguistics was asked to read through the transcripts and to create a coding system of interview data. On juxtapositioning the two category systems, it was found that they were very similar. This indicated that the original categorisation of themes was reasonably accurate and complete. The final themes were:

1. Beliefs about significance of learning English
2. Beliefs about their learning agenda
3. Beliefs about responsibility for language development
4. Beliefs about optimal strategies for learning English
5. Beliefs about sufficiency of classroom input
6. Beliefs about classroom collaboration
7. Beliefs about independent learning opportunities
8. Beliefs about independent learning

3.5. Impact of FGIs on the Scale Design

As explained in the introduction above, this study was driven with an epistemology that students hold certain

beliefs about autonomy and they have their assumptions about how to benefit from available resources to improve the linguistic competence independently. Using FGIs as a preliminary research instrument was particularly useful to see the representations of autonomy from students' eyes before devising the questionnaire for subsequent wider use. In this study, there were many examples of the FGIs' impact on the questionnaire. For instance, theme one about significance of learning English was directive for writing three items in the scale like "English is important for communication in the UAE", "Students' motivation improves their levels of English", and "I learn English for getting a good job in the future". In addition, extraction of theme four was important for composing some items about the different strategies students apply in learning English inside and outside classroom settings. Some of these items were "I know how to improve my English independently", "I ask my classmates about the points I do not understand", "I watch English movies without reading subtitles", "I like to chat with native speakers to improve my English", "Learning English depends more on memorization", and "I write down new vocabulary items in my notebook".

In another domain, theme seven about opportunities of independent language learning was directive to writing six items that reflect the beliefs as expressed by students in FGIs. Some of these items were "Using ILCs enhances learning English", "Students use audio-visual aids in English classes", "We use the Internet to do online English exercises", "Language teachers give us stories to read in free time", "Language teachers help us to use resources", and "Language teachers diversify English learning resources". Furthermore, theme eight about independent improvement of language skills was directive to composing some items in the scale like "I use the Internet to promote my language independently", "I use a dictionary to know the meaning of vocabulary items", "I use a grammar book to do exercises independently", and "I participate in the activities that improve my English". The same process was done with the other themes and the other items of the scale. This technique seems less positivist and eliminates the interference of the researcher in imposing the ideas that express a certain point of view.

3.6. General Reflections on the FGIs

Designing and conducting FGIs is a challenging enterprise for some researchers, but they help to obtain rich information about students' conceptions of autonomy which the questionnaire might not reveal. However, [4] argues that a potential limitation of the FGIs is when the moderator has less control over the data produced by participants since his/her role is to foster interaction, ask questions, and allow them to exchange discourse. This issue was treated by giving participants room to express their views, simultaneously intervening when discussions strayed off-topic. Another limitation is related to assembling participants because some individuals feel reluctant to participate because they are less articulate or less confident. This issue was treated by getting students' consent to participate in the interviews. In addition to these general limitations, some challenges were encountered while and after conducting FGIs. While moderating interviews, one feature was noticed which

calls "false consensus" as when students apparently agree with ideas so as not to have an odd view. This issue was handled by asking reflective questions to verify that these were their actual views. Transcribing the data of the FGIs represented another challenge whether to have a shortened transcription of certain extracts or a full transcription of the whole group discussion. The first option was unlikely because the focus would be on prominent views whereas minor ideas would be excluded from transcription and analysis as well. That is why the second option was recommended because it gave a full record of contributions that enabled the researcher to have enough and deliberate reading of transcripts and to see the general trend of responses. This choice was found in agreement with the proposition of [14] who argues that complete transcription "allows the sort of focused attention on the minutiae of talk that promotes insights into technique and content". It was also supported by [14] who states that complete transcripts "can be difficult, slow and time-consuming, but are usually more rigorous and productive than abridged transcripts or a simple debriefing report".

Generally speaking, while a prominent merit of FGIs lies in the opportunity they give for researchers to observe interaction on a topic and discern similarities and differences in participants' opinions and experiences, their strengths and potential weaknesses flow from the two features that distinguish them from other qualitative instruments. They rely on "researcher's focus" and "group's interaction" [13]. Unplanned moderation of FGIs can result in too much but irrelevant data; whereas having inactive participants or who are reticent in their ideas can hardly achieve the prospective goals of conducting them. Reference [13] explains that too low level of participants' involvement can result in having insufficient information which leads the researcher to collect only scattered instances of the desired materials. On the contrary, high involvement of participants, particularly with controversial topics, confronts the researcher with "a choice between either giving control to the group and possibly hearing less about the topic of interest or taking control over the group, and possibly losing the free-flowing discussion that was the original intent of the focus group interview" [13]. As a result, in order to benefit from FGIs, they should not be viewed as a "quick and easy" tools of collecting data; they otherwise necessitate skilful planning of a topic guide and understanding when to interfere. The tenet of this paper was to provide a practical overview and critical elaboration of how FGIs were used to investigate students' beliefs about autonomy in particular and how they were used in research pertaining to applied linguistics and language-related disciplines at large.

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