



Fostering Learner Autonomy in Educational Settings

Sara Kashefian-Naeeni^{1*}; Yousef Kouhpeyma²

^{1*} Department of English Language, Faculty of Paramedical Sciences, Shiraz University of Medical Sciences, Shiraz, Iran

² Department of Foreign Languages, Sepidan Branch, Islamic Azad University, Sepidan, Iran

*Correspondence Emails: kashefian@gmail.com & kashefian@sums.ac.ir

<http://dx.doi.org/10.18415/ijmmu.v7i7.1765>

Abstract

There is an old proverb which says “Give a man a fish, and you feed him for a day. Teach a man to fish, and you feed him for a lifetime”, the connotation of the proverb is to help somebody do something on his or her own; this can be a perfect basis for teaching a language. Autonomy is a concept which transcends beyond learning and is not only limited to educational settings. When people exert independence in their work, new horizons will be opened to them and they will be more susceptible to succeed in their lives. Teachers are not available throughout students’ lives; therefore, students must learn how to learn and how to be independent from their teachers. In today’s world with Corona pandemic in most countries, though many students receive off-line contents from their teachers, if they do not accept responsibility for their own learning, no fruitful upshots will be gained in their studies. Thus, it is mandatory for students to know what to learn and how to learn; in other words, they should practice autonomy in learning. The role of teacher in guiding learners toward gaining learners autonomy stands out. In a successful education system, there are many non-stop researches conducted to enhance the quality and efficiency of education. The present research tried to make some contribution and move in line with this purpose and to provide a compendium of information about ways to foster learner autonomy in educational settings.

Keywords: *Learner Autonomy; Educational Settings; University Students; Learning*

Introduction

Though the swing of the pendulum has shifted towards learner-centered education, in a multitude of EFL settings, teacher-centered education is still practiced. In this type of education, learners are dependent on their teachers and cannot take responsibility for their own learning. As a result, a significant number of the learners, if not most, fail to successfully learn their target language. However, teachers, as it is supposed to be common practice, should guide learners learn how to learn in order for them to become autonomous. Therefore, first of all, teachers themselves should have clear understanding of the

concept of learner autonomy. Then, they must be aware of the effective strategies which can be employed to address the drawback, that is, the lack of learner autonomy.

There have been a lot of researches as to how to accomplish this; several ways have been suggested by the researches, one of which is reflection. Reflection requires learners to analyze their experiences so as to learn from them. A great deal of attention has been given to learner autonomy over the past decades by researchers in the world; researchers have shown lots of interest in studying how learner autonomy can contribute to language learning. At first, European researchers (e.g., Holec, 1981; Little, 1991) started carrying out researches with regard to learner autonomy, then their counterparts in Asia (e.g., Benson, 2001; Littlewood 2007), as well as researchers in other parts of the world, started investigating the term.

There are various benefits to promoting learner autonomy; according to Little (1991), the benefits of promoting learner autonomy can be summarized in three important areas: The first benefit is that since learners participate in the process of making decisions, “learning should be more focused and more purposeful, and thus more effective both immediately and in the longer term” (Little, 1991; p. 8). The second one is that “because responsibility for the learning process lies with the learner, the barriers between learning and living that are often found in traditional teacher-led educational structures should not arise” (Little, 1991). And the last but not the least, it is likely that learners transfer this autonomy to other areas of their lives, and this makes them more responsible people in the society. In addition to Little, there are some other experts in the field that have found some evidence about learner autonomy’s effectiveness; Benson (2008), Littlewood (1997), etc.

As a result of views that have changed in the field of English Language Teaching (ELT), the greatest emphasis has been put on learners, and that is why learner-centered education came into being in which students’ involvement is more noticeable as compared to that of teacher-centered education. Littlewood (1996) defined learner autonomy in three areas; autonomy as a learner, autonomy as a communicator and autonomy as a person. Then, Littlewood argues, in order to succeed in these areas, learners must have ability and willingness. Benson (2008) believes that “because the concept of autonomy in learning draws its meaning from the concept of personal autonomy, it is centrally concerned with the kind of learning that best helps people to lead autonomous lives”. The phrase “autonomous lives” refers to learners’ freedom regarding the “free choice of goals and relations as essential ingredients of individual well-being” (Benson 2008). Concerning Benson’s definition, it can be said that autonomy becomes a part of learners’ lives, not just for a specific situation. However, as some definitions belonging to learner autonomy are not clear enough, it has led to some misconceptions in this regard. Little (1991) argues that there are a number of misconceptions as to what autonomy is; He believes that the most common misconception is that some people think autonomy is a synonym for self-instruction. Self-instruction means learning without a teacher (Little, 1991). Some learners who learn through self-instruction may attain a high level of autonomy, but many others may not; “For autonomy is not exclusively or even primarily a matter of how learning is organized” (Little, 1991, p. 3).

Autonomy may help learners to learn a foreign language independently as in finding solutions and appropriate learning methods for themselves. According to Benson, although there are different perspectives in the field of autonomy, many agree that autonomy plays the most important role in acquiring authentic language (Benson, 2001). In any EFL context teachers have very noticeable roles in developing autonomy awareness for learners during the teaching process. Autonomy in learning is relatively a new concept in language learning in Iranian EFL context. Hence, it is at times hard to engage Iranian EFL learners in autonomous learning. This also includes Iranian advanced EFL learners who are often dependent on their teachers in that the teachers manage their learning, decide for them and take

some other actions which learners are supposed to take. Therefore, learners should be provided with opportunities to discover their strengths and weaknesses and to solve any problem they face during the learning process so as to become autonomous learners.

Definition of Learner Autonomy

There are a number of definitions for the term 'learner autonomy' defined by the experts in education. A couple of them will be delved into. One of the most prominent ones belongs to Holec (1981); he defined Learner Autonomy as the "ability to take charge of one's own learning. Holec pointed out that being an autonomous learner signifies that one is able "to have, and to hold the responsibility for all the decisions concerning all aspects of this learning, i.e. determining the objectives; defining the contents and progressions; selecting methods and techniques to be used; monitoring the procedures of acquisition properly speaking (rhythm, time, place, etc.); evaluating what has been acquired (Holec, 1981, p. 3).

There are a few attributes that can be understood from Holec's definition of learner autonomy; the first one is that Learner Autonomy is a characteristic of the learner not the process which is not something innate, rather it is achieved through purposeful and systematic learning process. The second attribute deals with a potential capacity to be active in learning situations. And the last one has to do with becoming responsible for the decisions that he/she makes with regard to the learning process. Holec emphasizes two key elements in Learner Autonomy; responsibility and capacity. Other experts defined definitions for Learner Autonomy with new dimensions; Little defined Learner Autonomy as "a capacity for detachment, critical reflection, decision making and independent action". In this definition, little puts a considerable weight to psychology in Learner Autonomy. Because of this psychological definition of learner autonomy, a lot of people wondered as to what the components of learner autonomy were. Some experts believe that Learner responsibility means that Learners are cognizant of their roles which might be the reason to such psychological definitions. Dam (1995, 2008) defined autonomous learners as people who are able to take charge of their learning, act autonomously, and are motivated in the learning process. In another definition, Littlewood (1996) described the notion of autonomy as "learners' ability and willingness to make choices independently" (p. 427). He argued that "this capacity depends on two main components: ability and willingness" (p. 428). These two components are interdependent and are divided into subcomponents. According to Littlewood (1996), ability depends on possessing the knowledge regarding the alternative choices accessible and the skills to carry on the choices. Willingness depends on the motivation and confidence of the learner to take responsibility for the choices required. Therefore, according to Littlewood in order to be a successful autonomous learner, a student must have four subcomponents: knowledge, skill, motivation, and confidence. Interestingly, Benson added a new dimension to his definition of the term Learner Autonomy; he defined the term as the learner's rights. These variations in defining this terms have helped learner autonomy to be understood and put into practice. Oxford (2003; p. 81) has stated that "consideration of all relevant perspectives is likely to provide a stronger, richer understanding of learner autonomy".

Educational Significance of Learner Autonomy

In the 21st century, learning English is one of the opportunities allowing people to keep up with the rest of the world. Accordingly, a lot of people are trying to learn this important language. However, a significant number of EFL learners fail to fulfil this goal. There are a lot of factors involved in the failure, some of which stem from learners being dependent on their teachers in teacher-centered pedagogy. In this type of education, learners are not fostered to think and they are only participants in the learning process. This is also the case with many EFL learners who participate in English classes, both in their schools and

language institutes, which are mostly teacher-oriented rather than learner-oriented. As a result, a number of learner-centered approaches to teaching language have emerged. Rather than seeing the learner as a passive container to be filled with the teacher's ideas, these humanist approaches considered the learner as someone who actively shapes his or her learning experiences with the purpose of self-development and fulfilment (Stevick 1980).

In an influential impetus work done in the 1970s and 1980s on identifying the characteristics of the 'good language learner' (Naiman et al., 1978), it was found that successful language learners shared a number of characteristics, such as being proactive in their learning and self-motivated. "The importance of learner autonomy is sometimes explained in terms of a positive relation between present and future learning. Learners who accept responsibility for their learning are more likely to achieve their learning targets; and if they achieve their learning targets, they are more likely to maintain a positive attitude to learning in the future" (Dickinson 1987, cited in Fahim and Behdani, 2011, p. 61). According to the findings of a project conducted by Dam and Legenhausen (1996) in 1992, learners in an autonomous class were better than learners following a more traditional language program in terms of C-test scores. The project supported the view that autonomous learning environment can affect learners' success in a positive way.

Learner autonomy through a focus on learner reflection and taking responsibility for one's own learning processes has become a central concern in the recent history of language teaching (Holec, 1981). Fostering learner autonomy requires learners "to determine the objectives, to define the contents and progressions, to select methods and techniques to be used, to monitor the procedures of acquisition and to evaluate what has been acquired" (Holec, 1981, p. 3). However, as it is commonly interpreted, learner autonomy does not mean self-instruction or that teachers must be redundant. It is seen that successful learners are autonomous and capable of applying appropriate strategies to their learning (Oxford, 1996). If autonomy is fostered, learning becomes more focused and purposeful for learners (Little, 1991). Thus, learner autonomy must be integrated into language classrooms in order for learners to decide for their own learning processes.

Approaches to Foster Learner Autonomy

In learning a foreign language, the role of autonomy is perceptibly crucial. Hence, language learners who want to learn a language must have autonomy to a high level to succeed in doing this. Language teachers also play an important role in helping learners gain autonomy in language learning. According to a lot of well-known experts in the field, autonomy cannot be taught; Benson (2003) argues that "autonomy can be fostered, but not taught" (p. 290). Broady and Kenning (1996) also believe that "learner autonomy cannot be taught in the traditional sense, but can only be 'promoted'" (p. 9). Benson (2011) proposes six different approaches to developing autonomy which include resource-based, technology-based, learner-based, classroom-based, curriculum-based and teacher-based approaches.

Resource-based approach

Resource-based approach focuses on learners' independent interaction with learning materials. These learning materials give learners the responsibility of how much to use as well as the ways of using the materials (Edge & Wharton, 1998). There are a couple of key concepts with regard to this approach which are self-access (Benson, 2001, p. 113) and distance learning (Benson, 2001, p. 131). As the attention in language learning has shifted from passive learners to active learners, "self-access language learning has

emerged as a complement to the more traditional face-to-face learning model, with self-access centers now operating in many parts of the worlds” (Morrison, 2008, p. 123).

Morrison (2008), in his study, interviewed sixteen students who had participated in his study to respond to the question “What is a self-access center?” The data analysis showed that self-access centers are important in language learning in higher education as they promote language learning together with independent learning. To pave the way for this study, he inspected the self-access centers to find out about things like learners’ profile, the resources and the materials in the centers, the learning environment and so forth. Morrison stated that learners need to be assessed to be cognizant of their needs. In addition, he pointed out that students need to be trained to gain skills and have strategies in order to be able to use the centers in an effective way. According to the findings of this study, to have self-access centers run effectively and help foster autonomous learning, learners must know how self-access centers work.

In another study relating to resource-based approach, Cranker and Servais (2013) carried out a study to solve the challenges with regard to accessibility of materials and the fostering of autonomy. They used a system (developed by the University of Delaware) by the name of Individualized Education Plan (IEP) which includes a web-based database for searching self-access learning (SAC) materials and linking the curriculum to self-access learning materials; and learner surveys. According to the results, anecdotal reporting and observation appeared to meet the expectations to some degree “particularly in encouraging more self-directed behaviors and use of the SALC for its intended purpose” (p. 111). The study also indicated that teachers’ roles are crucial in helping students be aware of their role and use the system effectively. How to use self-access centers is of great significance and the role of teachers in encouraging their students as to how to use them can help students attain learner autonomy by developing independent learning.

Technology-based Approach

This approach includes some forms such as computer assisted language learning (CALL), computer mediated communication (CMC), etc. In a research conducted by Dand and Robertson (2010) in a Vietnamese context, they investigated the relationship and the impact of computer technology on Learner Autonomy. In this study, Learner Autonomy was viewed from the aspect of sociocultural perspectives which emphasizes the interactions between students and their environment. The researchers found a strong connection between CMC (computer mediated communication) and Learner Autonomy. The findings of the study suggested that EFL educators need to take advantage of learners social e-habits for educational purposes and confirmed that this approach, for Vietnamese learners, may be a feasible option to use so as for students to become autonomous.

In another study, Arikan and Bakla (2011) investigated the role of blogs in promoting autonomy. The learners in an eight-week period developed blog by uploading the materials they read and wrote. In doing the tasks, “they [the participants] made decisions about the layout and the content, what reading texts to select and upload, and what and how to write in addition to responding to the content of blogs written by their peers”. The researchers stated that the posts that the learners publish on the blogs can be seen by visitors, and this can be the feature that is appealing for most students. In addition, they pointed out that the participants faced a few difficulties during the research, the most important one was that most of learners were not good at computer and that is why the researchers stated that “before undertaking such a project, teachers should make sure that their learners are reasonably computer literate and conversant with the internet” (p. 241). The researchers stressed that “Teacher should endeavor to give students decision-making rights” by “being guided by a knowledgeable teacher, learners can study a second language autonomously” (p. 241).

Learner-Based Approach

The emphasis of learner-based approach is on the direct production of behavioral and psychological changes in the learners, which helps them take control over their learning to a greater extent. This approach is primarily concerned with learner development and training in skills and strategies, for example, developing learners' metacognitive knowledge can be an example in this regard. Benson (2001) believes that "the primary goal of all approaches is to help learners become 'better' language learners" (p. 142).

In a research conducted by Ushioda (2011), it was concluded that "...why autonomy? Not because we want to motivate our students and share their identities in predetermined ways, but because we want them to fulfill their potential to be the persons they want to become and do the things they value in a healthy way" (p. 230). Experts in the field of learner autonomy in language acquisition have a general consensus that autonomous learners have a high degree of motivation. However, considering the mutual relationship between motivation and learner autonomy, Spratt et al (2002) in a research looked into the order of these two, that is, which one should come first. They came to the conclusion that "motivation is the key factor that influences the extent to which learners are ready to learn autonomously, and that teachers might therefore endeavor to ensure motivation before they train students to become autonomous" (p. 245).

Yu (2006) conducted a study in which she referred to three integrated factors which influence autonomy in the Chinese context; motivation, meta-cognitive knowledge and the learning environment. Yu's research found that teachers must be aware of the three aforementioned factors to help foster learner autonomy. In another research done by Saka et al (2010), they wanted to investigate "students' current wishes for learner autonomy and teachers' implementing activities to correspond to student needs in order to promote learner autonomy" (p. 12). They had conducted another research back in 2006 with 107 participants in Japan, Korea and Taiwan. The second research was based upon the first one. Saka et al aimed to find out how gender difference influences learner autonomy. The first research had found that learners were reluctant to take part in class management, and therefore, not willing to develop behaviors belonging to autonomous learners. The aim of the second research was to dig into the reasons of this reluctance. In their second research they found two reasons. The first reason was that, in decision making, the learners wanted to be engaged in certain tasks like in evaluating tasks. The reason why it was difficult for the participants to do the tasks confidently was that they were not trained with meta-cognitive skills. The researchers concluded that the part that must change to foster learner autonomy is teaching strategies.

Classroom-Based Approach

Experts supporting classroom-based approach argue that autonomy can be fostered best when learners work with their peers and teachers in classroom contexts. Classroom-based approach to learner autonomy focuses on the changes that happen in the relationships between learners and teachers in the classroom (Benson, 2001, p. 151). As Classroom-based approach has to do with providing learners with opportunities that develop and foster autonomy, it results in learners having the ability to decide over the classroom activities and also to evaluate their learning outcomes. In classroom-based approach, teachers must be aware and prepared to commit a training to help learners, in order to successfully promote learner autonomy, especially when learners need to learn some types of assessment (e.g., self-assessment and peer-assessment).

Curriculum- Based Approach

Curriculum-based approach emphasizes the idea of learner control over the curriculum as a whole. In other words, in this type of approach “the learner participates in the decision-making process and works with other learners and the teacher to decide what will be done in the language class and how it will be done” (Skehan, 1998, p. 262). When learners monitor the curriculum, they must take into consideration their preferences with regard to concepts such as “Learning Approaches, attitudes toward learning, learning styles, strategies used in learning, learning activities, patterns of interaction, degree of learner control over their own learning, what constitutes effective learning, and the nature of learning,” (Brown, 1995, p. 187).

In a study, Reinders and Balcikanli (2011) argued that learners should be supplied with explicit instructions to be responsible for all aspects of learning in the classroom. Considering the important role of textbooks, the researchers investigated as to how textbooks can foster autonomy and help learners become autonomous learners. The study made use of an evaluative framework to evaluate five common textbooks; Face to Face, New Cutting Edge, New Opportunities, The Interchange Series, and New Headway. The research found that “the language textbooks... do not explicitly encourage learner autonomy”, (p. 269) because they did not provide many opportunities for learners “to select their own learning strategies and provide practical tips around this” (p. 269); however, in terms of some aspects, the study found that some of the textbooks studied in the research provided some opportunities for the learners to monitor their learning process through raising some questions which are viewed as “strictly involve monitoring process” but “more about memorization” (p. 270). It indicates that even when textbooks do provide some opportunities for learners to foster autonomy, they offer “limited opportunity for practice to students” (p. 265). This is an effective approach to foster autonomy as when learners feel that their choices and decisions are valued they show more enthusiasm and motivation to participate in the learning process and the curriculum that they, to some extent, created.

Teacher-Based Approach

Teacher-based approach emphasizes the role of teachers and teachers’ professional development for fostering autonomy in their learners. Teacher autonomy plays an important role for learner autonomy because they can help learners assess their needs, set goals, evaluate themselves and so on in order for learners to do their independent language learning.

Feryok, in her study, studied the role of a Foreign Language (EFL) teacher of Japanese college. The findings of the study showed that the teacher understood autonomy “as student accountability for their own learning” (p. 213), and so as to promote learner autonomy, the teacher handed over management of classroom activities to the students. One of the implications of the research was that “teacher autonomy was the foundation on which this teacher's cognitions and practices were built” (p. 213). It can be learned from this study that to promote autonomy in language learning a teacher must have necessary skills with regard to learner autonomy first. Some experts in the field (e.g., Benson 2000, McGrath 2000) believe teacher autonomy and learner autonomy must co-exist so as for learners to develop autonomy.

Approaches to Fostering Learner Autonomy in Iran

Over the past two decades or so, a lot of attention has been given to approaches helping foster learner autonomy in the world, especially in developed countries. However, in the context of Iran, more researches in this regard are needed for deeper understanding of learner autonomy, since learner

autonomy is not common practice, if not also relatively a new concept; Kariminia and Salehi argue that “Iranian EFL teachers still practice traditional teaching methods such as grammar translation and audio-lingual methods, which fail to provide opportunities for pupils to use language communicatively (2007)”. In order to boost the quality of language learning, the traditional methods of learning should be replaced with the new methods which are more effective.

A number of studies regarding the use of autonomy-related approaches have been conducted in the Iranian context. On the whole, they have managed to find some effective findings about the use of different approaches to promote autonomy in the country, that is, Iran. Meshkat and Mohammadpoor (2015) conducted a study to explore the role of computer-assisted language learning (CALL) as a cognitive strategy in rendering EFL learners to participate in tasks related to reading comprehension. 60 students, who were in the third grade of high school, participated in this study. The students in the control group were taught in the traditional way using only the textbooks. However, the experimental group were taught by Information and Communication Technology (ICT). The researchers found that using technology in language learning especially in reading comprehension leads to successful results in the task. Moreover, teachers must be aware of learners’ needs and interests. Ultimately, the study suggests that CALL must be a necessary part of language learning. In a similar study, Farivar and Rahimi (2015) also found positive results following the use of computer-assisted language learning (CALL) on learner autonomy in Iran. 60 participants of the research were divided into two groups; a control group and an experiment group. The researchers made use of a Cambridge ESOL Preliminary Test (PET) to make sure that the learners were homogeneous. Data were collected using a five-scale Likert questionnaire and analyzed using ANCOVA on SPSS 18.0. In the study everything in the control and experimental groups was the same except for English software (BBC Courses) which was added to the experiments group’s materials. The findings indicated that learner autonomy was improved by using CALL.

Moreover, in another study, Kashefian and Riazi (2011) explored the beliefs of Iranian learners, who were either bachelors or masters majoring in English Literature, toward autonomy at Shiraz University. In the study, 168 participants from different age groups, marital status and professional status took part, with which the present study shares the factors of age and marital status. The researchers, according to the t-test for independent samples and analysis of variance, found that age did not affect the learners’ readiness for autonomy whereas marital status did influence the participants’ autonomy. In addition, Kashefian et al (2012) conducted a rather similar study to the one above entitled “The Role of Social Factors in Iranian University Students' Predispositions towards Autonomous Language Learning”. This study included the factors of age, professional status, marital status together with gender and academic achievement. In that study, some of background variables such as professional status and marital status affected learners’ readiness for autonomy.

It can be said that technology paves the way toward learner autonomy perceptibly and without it, it is much harder to achieve this important goal. Ghaemi et al (2015) investigated the effects of Group work on the EFL learners’ proficiency. They randomly divided the participants into two groups; a control group and an experiment group. They used two instruments to gather data; a 30-item proficiency test for each level (beginner, lower intermediate, upper intermediate, and advanced intermediate) and the line of SPECTRUM series. The researchers found that the groups that worked with group work performed better at the end of the semester. In addition, the control group performed better in the independent t-test results. The study indicated that “Group work as a powerful technique proved itself as one of the best strategies in an EFL environment”. Having said that, we cannot rely on autonomy only on the part of learners to achieve the goal; teacher autonomy is of great significance as well which is like a supplement for learners’ autonomy and it must be considered. According to some researchers, to foster learner autonomy we must foster teacher autonomy (e.g., Benson 2000, McGrath 2000).

In another study, Mahdavinia and Ahmadi studied the use of portfolio in self-assessment as an approach to foster autonomy at the School of Applied Science and Technology (SAST) with their self-directed learning. The researchers used portfolio as an assessment alternative to the traditional assessment method named “one-shot-exam” (p. 77). According to Mahdavinia and Ahmadi, the traditional “one-shot-exam has two weaknesses; first is that this kind of exam is not reliable since it assesses the ability of learners only once at the end of each semester, and the second weakness is that “one-shot-learning” promotes memorization and rote-learning which does not lead to meaningful learning. The study found a number of benefits including “self-directed learning, improvement of self-confidence, development of self-assessment skills, a stress-free class, a friendly relationship between the teacher and students, development of reading skills as well as the other three skills, improvement in the depth of learners’ understanding, and desire to continue language learning” (p. 87). An effective outcome of this research is that learners are now better at setting realistic goals and directing their own learning.

Generally, in the studies delved into in the context of Iranian two points stand out more; the first point is that technology must be present in classrooms, and the second one has to do with both learner and teacher autonomy; they must co-exist. What is more, having a deep understanding of learner autonomy is crucial before rejecting or supporting it as it was an issue we dealt with in one of the studies in non-Iranian contexts.

Learner autonomy helps maintain learning and turns it into a life-long process, which is the key to successful language learning. Hence, there is a need for learners to gain autonomy with regard to learning the English language. The current study might be of interest to both syllabus designers and language teachers, primarily in terms of the goals that the study aimed to achieve as well as the methods made use of. There is a criticism about almost every common English textbook in terms of not paying attention to learner autonomy as much as they should. In other words, syllabus designers are said to be focusing on teaching materials having to do with learners’ English proficiency and not on materials that help learners improve their English proficiency and autonomy together. In case of having lessons fostering learner autonomy, learners would actively participate in the teaching process as autonomy-based lessons take into consideration the learners’ opinions and suggestions when it comes to making decisions for teaching materials.

Conclusion

Second Language Acquisition (SLA) is not a process which begins and ends in classrooms; rather it is a lifelong process. In language classrooms learners must be taught as to how to take responsibility for their own learning outside the class. Learning encompasses several intriguing factors that are in line with maximizing learner's potentiality in acquiring a foreign language. In fact, EFL learners learn a foreign language with a lot of factors being involved and that is a probable reason why different learners learn a language unequally. One of the most contributing factors, in gaining the knowledge of English as a foreign language (EFL), that needs to be thoroughly taken into consideration is learner autonomy.

Learner autonomy needs to be delved into so as to find out how it can facilitate learning. This paper accentuates significance of autonomy and explicates different approaches to foster autonomy. The role of teacher in guiding learners toward gaining learners autonomy is indisputable. Autonomy, in order to be strengthened, needs to be mutual; meaning that not only students, but also teachers should understand and facilitate it. It appears that sometimes, for some reason, teachers themselves are a constraint impeding learner autonomy in language classes. It is believed that for a successful journey toward fostering learner autonomy, teachers should also move in the right direction.

References

- Arikan, A. & Bakla, A. (2011). Learner autonomy online: Stories from a blogging experiences. In D. Gardner (Ed.), *Fostering autonomy in language learning* (pp. 240-251). Gaziantep: Zirve University.
- Benson, P. (2000). Autonomy as a learners' and teachers' right. In B. Sinclair, I.
- Benson, P. (2001) *Teaching and Researching Autonomy in Language Learning*. London: Longman.
- Benson, P. (2008). Teachers' and learners' perspectives on autonomy. In T. Lamb & H. Reinders (Eds.), *Learner and teacher autonomy: Concepts, realities, and responses* (pp. 15-32). Philadelphia, PA: John Benjamins.
- Benson, P. (2011). *Teaching and researching autonomy* (2nd ed.). London: Pearson.
- Benson, P. (2003) Learner autonomy in the classroom. In D. Nunan (Ed.), *Practical English Language Teaching* (p. 289-308). NY: McGraw Hill.
- Broady, E. and M.M. Kenning (1996). Learner autonomy: an introduction to the issues. In *Promoting Learner Autonomy in University Language Teaching*, edited by E. Broady and M.M. Kenning. London: AFLS in association with CILT.
- Brown, J.D. (1995) *The Elements of Language Curriculum: a Systematic approach to Program Development*. Heinle & Heinle Publishing, Boston.
- Cranker, K., & Servais, N. (2013). A move towards autonomy: Individualized education plans for effective materials use. *Studies in Self-Access Learning Journal*, 4(2), 96-124.
- Dang, T. T. & Robertson, M. (2010). Impacts of learning management system on learner autonomy in EFL learning. *International Education Studies*, 3(3), 3-11.
- Dickinson, L., & Carver, D. (1980). Learning how to learn: Steps towards self-direction in foreign language learning in schools. *ELT Journal*, 35(1), 1-7.
- Edge, J. & Wharton, S. (1998) "Autonomy and development: living in the materials world". In Tomlinson, B. (ed.) *Materials Development in Language Teaching*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 295-310.
- Fahim, M. and Behdani, R. (2011). Critical Thinking Ability and Autonomy of Iranian EFL Learners. *American Journal of Scientific Research* ISSN 1450-223X, 29(2011), 59-72.
- Farivar, A., Rahimi, A. (2015). The Impact of CALL on Iranian EFL Learners' Autonomy. doi: 10.1016/j.

- Ghaemi, F., Hashemizadeh, M., Samimi, F., & Rahmanian. (2015). Group Learning Role in Foreign Language Learning: Group Work vs. Individual Work. *ELT Voices. International Journal for Teachers of English*. 5 (3), 2230-9136.
- Holec, H. (1981). *Autonomy and foreign language learning*. Oxford: Pergamon Press.
- Kariminia, A and Salehi, S (2007) Communication strategies: English Language Departments in Iran. *Journal of Language Studies (IJLS)* 1/4: 287–300.
- Kashefian, S., & Riazi, A, M. (2011). Beliefs and Autonomy: A Case of Iranian Students. *European Journal of Social Sciences*, 20(3), 425-430.
- Kashefian, S., Riazi, A, M., & Salehi, H. (2012). The Role of Social Factors in Iranian University Students' Predispositions towards Autonomous Language Learning. *Australian International Academic Centre*, 3(2), 41-51.
- Little, D. (1991). *Learner autonomy 1: Definitions, issues and problems*. Dublin: Authentik.
- Littlewood, W. (1996). “Autonomy”: An anatomy and a framework. *System*, 24(4), 427-435.
- Littlewood, W. (1997). Self-access: why do we want it and what can it do? In P. Benson & P. Voller (Eds.), *Autonomy and independence in language learning* (pp. 79-92). New York: Longman.
- Littlewood, W. (2007). Communicative and task-based in language teaching in East Asian classrooms. *Language Teaching*, 40, 243-249. doi:10.1017/S0261444807004363.
- Mahdavinia, M. & Ahmadi, L.N. (2011). Portfolio assessment: A tool for self-directed learning at post-secondary level. In D. Gardner (Ed.), *Fostering autonomy in language learning* (pp. 76-89). Gaziantep: Zirve University.
- McGrath and T. Lamb (eds.) *Learner autonomy, teacher autonomy: Future directions*. London: Longman. 111-117.
- McGrath, I. (2000). Teacher autonomy. In B. Sinclair, I. McGrath & T. Lamb (Eds.), *Learner autonomy, teacher autonomy: Future directions*, pp.100-110. Harlow, England: Pearson Education.
- Meshkat, M., Mohammadpoor, R. (2015). Exploring the Role of CALL as a Cognitive Strategy in Rendering EFL Learners to Engage Learners in Reading Comprehension. 9 (1), 2289 – 3245.
- Morrison, B. (2008). The role of the self-access centre in the tertiary language learning process. *System*, 36, 123-140. Doi: 10.1016/j.system.2007.10.004
- Naiman, N., Froehlich, H., Stern, H. & Todesco, A. (1978). *The good language learner*. Toronto: Ontario Institute for Studies in Education.

- Oxford, R. L. (Ed.). (1996). *Language learning strategies around the world: Cross-cultural perspectives* (No. 13). Natl Foreign Lg Resource Ctr.
- Reinders, H. & Balcikanli, C. (2011). Do classroom textbooks encourage learner autonomy? *Novitas-ROYAL* (Research on Young and Language), 5(2), 265-272.
- Sakai, S., Takagi, A., & Chu, M. (2010). Promoting learner autonomy: Student perceptions of responsibilities in a language classroom in East Asia. *Educational Perspectives*, 43(12), 12-27.
- Skehan, P. (1998). *A Cognitive Approach to Language Learning*. Oxford University Press.
- Spratt, M., & Humphreys, G., & Chan, V. (2002). Autonomy and motivation: which comes first? *Language Teaching Research*, 6 (3), 245-266. Doi: 10.1191/1362168802lr106oa.
- Stevick, E. (1980). *Teaching languages: a way and ways*. Rowley: Newbury House Publishers.
- Ushioda, E. (2011). Why autonomy? Insights from motivation theory and research. *Innovation in language learning and teaching*, 5(2), 221-232. doi: 10.1080/17501229.2011.577536.
- Yu, P. (2006). On the factors influencing learner autonomy in Chinese EFL contexts. *Sino-US English Teaching*, 5(3), 5-9.

Copyrights

Copyright for this article is retained by the author(s), with first publication rights granted to the journal.

This is an open-access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).