



LEARNERS' AUTONOMY IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE LEARNING

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ABSTRACT

English is a universal language that bridges the communication between many nations. It is also evident that nations like India, South Africa, Canada, Switzerland, Wales, and Ireland etc. which have multi-lingual languages are running smoothly with the common language English. Moreover the biggest advantage of the universal language (English) is we gain knowledge from various cultures and scientific discoveries from different parts of the world through the common medium English. English as the second language in the foreign nations is acquired by the students whose native language is not English is a complicated process. Generally English language is taught by the teacher to the students like any other subject; with this process of teaching such as Grammar Translation method or Structural approach the teaching becomes teacher-centred. Students hardly learn and they stop where the teacher stops. It pressurises the students to memorise the grammar with set of rules. This ceases their communicative English; significant point why many students are only good at writing English but zero in spoken English. So the importance should be given to Learning, Speaking, Reading and Writing skills rather concentrating on only one. There are few methods which are based on the learner's autonomy; they are, Communicative Language Teaching, The Silent Way, and The Natural Method etc. Students' learning would grow continuously with the latter case as it is student-centred approach. Also, they involve themselves voluntarily in learning English language without a bit of stress; with this the learner's atmosphere is fulfilled with charisma.

Key Words Learner, Autonomy, Activities, LSRW skills, Peer-learning, Teacher, Facilitator, Involvement, Lesson plan, Consciousness, Student's interest, Specific talent, ability, Role played.

INTRODUCTION

Learners' Autonomy is to take charge of one's own learning. David Little defines 'autonomy' as "essentially a matter of the learner's psychological relation to the process and content of



learning". This paper aims in the autonomy of the learner in the sense the learner's participation with consciousness to the content of learning with teacher's aide. It also specifies how the teachers become less of an instructor and more of a facilitator. In the current education system student's inborn capacity is suppressed by the teacher- centred class room. Though the language teacher is so good in his/ her subject, at times he/ she fails to find the level of understanding and learning that the student achieves through the process of teaching.

The multiplicity of aims imposed upon the teacher in achieving the perfection of the target language by the current system of education is sometimes discouraging the teacher. If the student is interested in academic learning, technical learning or any other specific part of learning a language then it is time to turn towards autonomous learning by doing more work on the subject preferred by the self. Each student is an individual who has selective ability and preferences; moreover language is not knowledge but a skill which can be gained through enough of practise in everyday life. For example, a student interested in pronunciation of English language has to work on the phonetics and bring out the skill of articulating forty four English sounds applying that to the usage of words. Tools such as mp3 player should be used regularly by the learner to hear the exact recording of the Received Pronunciation; as listening is very important for pronunciation.

The autonomy of learners increases the activity of the student in the class room setting itself. This form of learning is not only suitable for the self-learning members but is more useful for the teacher facilitated autonomous learner in the class room set up. Here the learners are reinforced to organize their ideas, modify and restructure the thoughts, draft and redraft, seek feedback and negotiate with their peers and the teachers to accomplish the desired results. Thus the learner autonomy can be generated through classroom negotiations. This avoids the passive role of the student and their over reliance on the teacher.

The significant point that is stressed in this paper is the instructions given by the teacher (who acts as a facilitator) will reduce the interpersonal clash between students who are supposed to work in groups and enhance on the target based approach. The interest in the concept of learner autonomy evolved in the final solution for better result. In order to impart required autonomy the following steps are to be followed:

1. To make the learners realize the inner thought process with the mother tongue and train them to think in the language aimed, say English.
2. Since autonomy system is new to the students the teachers has to gradually shift the responsibility onto the learners rather completely overloading with works on the initial stage of autonomous learning.



3. The teacher should sometimes encourage the students even if they fail in the target achievement; teacher has to see the other part of improvement of the student such as Semantics.
4. The teacher must mediate between requirements of the syllabus and various agendas of the learners thus giving up the conventional teacher- control habits.
5. The teacher should initiate the activities with willingness and prepare a lesson plan to let the result to a higher degree. The teacher, as a result will recognise the potentials of all the participants and if it is done on the common platform.

In this way the traditional way of giving respect and importance to the teachers are also fulfilled without them being replaced by the learners. On the other hand it is not so easy as it seems to be because the teacher is the pivot of this entire process; consciously judging an individual's interpretations as well as the group's co-ordination, development and participation of every learner/ student. Teacher's complete involvement to initiate the task and organizing the students mind to work on allotted tasks (by knowing the fruit of such activity) results in the success of Foreign Language Learning (English Language Learning) in classroom setting.

Learners autonomy accompanied by peer group activities has significant bearing on what is acquired and retained for future use. American research accumulated over the period of more than thirty years concludes that students learn language best by collaborating with their peers (Newman and Thompson). It is thus a challenge for the present day language teacher to establish a more natural and less threatening classroom setting for achieving the desired goals. A teacher can structure the learning environment into three stages:

1. Setting an environment for individual learning
2. Create an environment of competitive learning
3. Establishing an environment for co-operative learning

On the basis of these three methods of learning, it can be said that the first two methods provoke the learners pursue personally beneficial goals while the third method encourages the learners to learn and accomplish the common and shared goals. Success depends on the mutual relationship among the groups. But unfortunately the importance of these relationships has not been fully recognised in language teaching. As group learning values differences so should group learning be done on the basis of mixed abilities and mixed mother tongues. Thus avoiding homogeneous groups and by promoting heterogeneous groups, team activities and language learning skills can be enhanced.



Diversity provides opposition which is essential for problem solving but care should be taken that the number is restricted to four and six so that every learner contributes positively for the final output. The activity assigned should demand the division of labour, division of resources and proper teacher input. This involves proper observation, monitoring and regular feedback only then it can be ensured that actions are coordinated; information is communicated evenly between all the group members and resources properly pooled. The teacher also has to look for the sharing of information within group has occurred through the effective usage of learning tools (such as charts, maps, books, encyclopaedias, laptops, computers etc.) given by the teacher.

Another important aspect of cooperative group work is an awareness of task processing technique. Encouraging the learners to think about the way they are working fosters more critical, productive and independent learners. It helps students develop autonomy and acquire the skills to learn with their peers. All this gradually and automatically shifts the crucial teaching responsibility of a teacher to the learners themselves, thus avoiding the conventional teacher control methods of teaching. Also the typical learner mentality of shifting the burden of teaching and language acquisition on the teacher can thus be curbed, otherwise the foreign language learning (specifically, English) will continue to end up on meaningless responsibilities of competing the course assigned by the university syllabi and this slant and self-defeating practices takes on negative implications leading to personality conflicts between the teacher and the taught. Thus the paper strongly advocates the perfect blend of teacher control and student autonomy for practicing the Foreign Language learning.

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