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Autonomy in Language Learning and Teaching

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ABSTRACT

There is a human need to continuously innovate and use language to construct new meaning to propagate human evolution. Language grows over time to deal with complexities and also undergoes changes in accordance with the needs of the language users. Thus new/complex language is innovated to handle and communicate new meaning. Language learning with the idea of learner's autonomy is employed primarily to express 'known meaning' rather than to construct 'unknown meaning'. The purpose is to facilitate the learning task into a creative task. The use of multicultural experiences and constraints facilitate creativity thereby laying emphasis on the autonomy of learner being a major psychology phenomenon. Autonomy is thus a multifaceted concept.

Keywords: Autonomy, Learning, pedagogical principles

Introduction

Learner autonomy is a modern concept, referred extensively in the spheres of English Language Teaching. Autonomy of the learner is not a particular method. It may not be confused with individualism. The development of learner autonomy can be seen as an educational goal which is cross-culturally valid. Though different forms of pedagogy are required to work under its guiding embrace. The psychological relation of the learner to the process and content of learning may broadly be understood as the Autonomy of the Learner. Autonomy, as the word suggests, leads to various misguided concepts. Approaches that equate the process of giving 'autonomy' with 'strategy training' have been less successful as compared to mainstream teacher-led approaches. The benefits of teaching learners' strategies are still to be demonstrated. Despite the expansion of language and literature, this autonomy on the part of the learner i.e. learners' autonomy remains a pursuit of the few.

Perhaps, this form of 'autonomy', threatens the power structures of educational culture. It has been a dominant belief that the autonomy on the part of the learner is exclusively a Western cultural construct. Thus, it is believed to be alien to the learners in other cultures. Here it needs to be emphasized that autonomy of the Learner is a psychological phenomenon that can transcend cultural difference. However, 'Learning Behavior' is conditioned culturally.

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Autonomy in the Learning & Teaching of a language leads us to develop an original learning strategy which is flexible and easy to adapt. It lays emphasis on the student and his specific needs and motivations. Such a flexible strategy is designed to free the learner from the consultative and traditional pedagogical limitations. The support in such a strategy is provided by the 'teacher', but at the core of it, the learning process is self-initiated and/or group – initiated. The focus is mainly on the production of a collective 'project', where the individual work alternates with group work. The members of the group define the set of objectives or a task corresponding to the set of objectives (Sharma, 2015). In the process, the student masters the social functions of language. Thus learning/teaching becomes an active and creative process of language acquisitions, where the dynamics of interaction induce speech reflexes and acts within authentic communicative situations.

Review

The pedagogical approach views autonomy lacking on the part of the learner and so as one that is needed to be trained towards. Others are of the opinion that the learner to some extent is able to exercise control over their own learning. The existing autonomy of the learner can be utilized as an important basis for its progressive development. This can be done through the supportive engagement of the learner. The notion that the learner has the power and right to learn for themselves is fundamental to the idea of autonomy. Autonomy is a multifaceted concept. It can be interpreted, and the meaning is discussed with many perspectives. Autonomy makes the learner an active and creative participant in the process of language acquisition. Interaction gives prominence to natural speech reflexes, thereby authentic situations for communication are evolved (Arora, 2015).

Learner autonomy is fundamental to the program of self-access language learning. Here it becomes desirable to provide some kind of advisory to the learner. Thus Learner counselling is central to the self- access literature. Learning is a process of

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supporting performance and emphasis has to be laid on the interdependence of the cognitive and social interactive dimensions. The autonomy in learning and developing the skills cannot be separated entirely from the context of learning (Wadhwa, 2017, 2018). This must be kept in mind that learning a language is somewhat different from learning mathematics or science or even social sciences. It is argued that autonomy on the part of the English Language learner makes than more reflectively engaged with their learning. Thus, making him more focused, making learning more personal. Thereby making the entire process more efficient and effective (Malik, 2017).

When the learner is proactive & committed, they become more and more motivated. The autonomous learner develops attitudinal and reflective competence to overcome all the difficulties of learning and the setbacks. Effective communication depends mainly on a combination of procedural skills that are achieved only through use and practice. A learner with social autonomy and autonomy in the learning environment find it easier to master the rules of discourse thereby achieving effective and spontaneous communication.

A learner with autonomy understands the purpose of the learning/teaching programme. Autonomy on the part of the learner compels them to be responsible for their learning, share the goals and objectives of learning a language. They are involved in the planning and execution of the learning activities, and at the same time are liable and competent to review their learning and its effectiveness. A higher level of responsibility is laid on the learner while granting him autonomy as it is believed that learner autonomy requires insight, a positive attitude, a capacity for reflection and a readiness to be pro-active in self-management and also the capability to interact with others. These also focus and outline the challenges faced while granting autonomy to the learner.

A holistic view of learner's autonomy captures the idea of the learner being equipped with the cognitive, metacognitive, effective and social dimensions of language learning (Shukla, 2015). Thus, the challenges faced by learner's autonomy are met. Developing independence on the part of the learner of the English language is an endeavor that continues lifelong, with the learner setting their own objectives and follow strategies devised by themselves to achieve those objectives. Learner's autonomy demands the involvement of the learner which leads deeper and better learning of the English Language. Fostering autonomy of the English teaching/learner i.e. learner independence starts in the classroom but extends and continues lifelong.

Notions of learning be it autonomous or/and independent are at times interlinked. They are vital in the field of language learning. While learner's independence focus on the choice of the learner, is learner-centered, thereby viewing the learner as an individual with needs and rights. On the other hand, the autonomy of the learner lay emphasis on interdependence in learning. Autonomy, thus, is the ability to operate independently with the language. Language learning is essentially an independent process along with ways of organizing learning independently of teacher control.

The basic pedagogical principles of learner's autonomy are learner's involvement, learner's reflection and appropriate use of the English language. Thus the autonomy in learning can be granted only to those who able to reflect on their own learning along with the knowledge about learning and has the competence and capability to learn in collaboration with others. Autonomy on the part of the learner can be successfully implemented only by involving the strategies that focus on the use of English language as the preferred medium from the very onset, thereby gradually developing a repertoire of useful learning thereby gradually developing a repertoire of useful learning activities, with an ongoing process of evaluation of the learning process. This can be achieved with comfortable coordination between the teacher, peer, and self-assessment. Visual supports help to capture the content of learning, support the development of spending and thus focus on assessment.

In recent times, new approaches and innovations have been used to develop learner's autonomy at different levels of English language learning. It has been again and again emphasized that 'autonomy' and 'responsibility' are crucial requirements of any language learning process with a view to granting autonomy. A teacher's role is very important in helping students develop autonomy in learning, besides other crucial functions such as management instructions. Autonomy of the learner has been considered as the ultimate goal in education in general and in particular language learning. The gamut of learning styles helps make the learner more creative and autonomous.

Conclusion

Autonomy on the part of the learner lays responsibility. Thus, responsibility and autonomy are intertwined and cannot be easily distinguished' Ecuyer states that 'The scope of wonder, which occurs at a metaphysical level, is greater than that of curiosity.' The misinterpretation based on the wrong assumption that the child's learning depends on an enriched environment re-enforces that Behaviorist -Approach to education and to parenting. This has led to understanding the child's sense of wonder. Learning becomes meaningful when associated with beauty, wonder, sensitivity, and security. Learning through mere repetition is a deadening routine. It thus becomes a training and not learning as it does not contemplate the human being as a whole. Seligman states that "Happiness in the present moment consists very different states from happy about the past and about the future and itself embraces two very distinct kinds of thing; pleasure and gratification." Thus, a happy learning approach leading to satisfaction is also enabled.

Thus autonomy in language learning can be achieved through some learning strategies and styles, thereby making the process of attaining autonomy a dynamic process. Belief in the student, mutual respect & converting the classroom into a place of discussions is key elements of autonomy. The center/focus is on the learner/student. There needs to be a shift in disposition. The learner's role in an autonomous environment is not one of the passive learners, rather autonomy grants the learner the ability and the willingness to learn on their own.

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