



A Critical Review of Autonomous Learning in L2 Research: From Theory to Practice

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Abstract

The decline of method-based pedagogy with its overemphasis on teaching procedures rather than learning procedures led to the emergence of learner-centered approaches. Autonomous learners are those who are capable of taking care of their own learning through setting their learning objectives, managing the process of learning and evaluating their learning outcomes. The principles of autonomous learning, however, is more in line with individualistic ESL situations rather than collectivist EFL contexts. Therefore, in this study, our attempt is to provide the stakeholders, through a critical review of relevant studies, with a profound account of the tenets of autonomous learning to help them better notice the necessities of their teaching and learning environments.

Keywords: autonomous learning, ESL/ EFL contexts, learner strategies, self-efficacy

INTRODUCTION

The concept of learner autonomy is currently central in the educational system, educational contexts and in the process of learning as well. Being familiar and discovering the criteria and factors and features which lead to autonomous learning and cause the students to act autonomously in the process of learning, help to progress and development of learning process, in that when students tries to act in isolation without cooperation of teacher the process of learning would be faster and easier and large amount of materials would be taught and transferred in short time and effectively.

This paper is an attempt to skim and scan through the papers, materials, sayings, discoveries and findings, opinions and comments of reviewers and learners kept in touch with the issue authentically and other related studies about concept of autonomous learning and analyze and discuss about them, also I would try to focus on

definitions and principles and approaches concerning learners autonomy, and my attitude in terms of this issue as well to reach a remarkable conclusion at the end.

Research over two decades have depicted that one of the important concepts in teaching second language is learner autonomy (Nunan, 2001; Cao Rongping, 2003). Learner autonomy according to Littlewood (1996) is one of the key concepts in theories that examine factors that help students develop their ability, teaching language for communication, group learning with having practice, and helping student think independently. Aoki (2000) specified that it serves as a vital objective among various subjects that are taught by educational system in Europe. Dam (1995) in another hand, notes that if learners find out their favorite materials, then trying to fix their goals with the organized task which has been chosen and finally look for the valid criteria for independent evaluation, are considered as autonomous learners.

PRINCIPLES OF AUTONOMOUS LEARNING

There are some approaches in ELT (English language teaching) that emphasize the assistance of students into taking control of their learning by the development of their meta-cognitive learning strategies. They are usually based on critical self-reflection, taking part in the topic selection, evaluation of their learning possibilities etc. These strategies have a very important role in students' learning. (Murphy, 2008). Moreover, autonomous pupils can apparently use the affective side of their learning experience to enhance their motivation. They gradually become autonomous as well as being more independent in the usage of English language. (Little, 2009). Many scientists and teachers are attempting to characterize the process of the development of student's personality. Zelina and Kosová (2000, p. 53) describe the following ways of this development:

- To teach students according to their own choice.
- To teach students to plan their own progression, divide their duties and time.
- To teach students ways to motivate themselves.
- To teach students how to relax.
- To teach students how to self-evaluate etc.

The autonomous pupil should be able to identify the relation between the things he/she needs to learn, how to learn them and what sources to use (Breen and Mann, 1997). Dickinson (1987) explains that there are many contexts and situations in which students need to take at least partial control of their learning. He also states that self-direction in learning is different from other contexts of self-direction. In the context of learning, we usually focus on the techniques of giving instructions rather than on students' attitudes. In his work he describes the following terms:

- Self-instruction is a neutral term for situations in which students work without the direct control of the teacher.

- Self-direction is a particular approach towards the task in which students accept the responsibility for all their decisions related to their learning.
- Autonomy is a situation in which a student is entirely responsible for all the decisions related to his/ her learning.
- Semi-autonomy describes the stage at which students are getting ready for autonomy.

Certainly, in the work of Dickinson, there are also other terms which define autonomous learning and teaching. Based on the above mentioned facts, a basic characteristic of the autonomous learner is the ability to give himself instructions, to be able to direct his own learning in case the teacher is not around and steadily get through the stage of semi-autonomy to the stage of full autonomy.

SELF-EFFICACY IN THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND LEARNING

Data from the different attached questionnaires of several papers (see the references) showed the learners' perceived self-efficacy was low among all learners. The results showed that there was a significant difference in the means for the successful and less successful users of autonomous learning with regard to the *self-efficacy* construct. The successful users of autonomous learning had a relatively higher self-concept of competence in English. These findings suggest less successful users of autonomous learning have a more negative projection of the chance of success in English learning than their successful counterparts. Such differences in attitudes were probably the result of the divergent levels of confidence between the two groups.

Significant differences of a lower magnitude also existed in other items in the *self-efficacy* construct concerning the learners' objective assessments of their performance in learning English. It is interesting to note that of the items for which no significant differences were found between the successful and less successful users of autonomous learning, there were related to the learners' self-concept of competence in taking control of their own learning. This suggests a poor grasp of meta-cognitive skills required for autonomous learning regardless of the learners' levels of success in autonomous learning. This deficiency is clearly perceived by the learners as shown in their written evaluations.

Both quantitative and qualitative data shows that a considerable number of learners, particularly those who were among the low achievers in English, felt distressed about management of their own learning in autonomous learning. They found it difficult to identify their weaknesses and locate suitable materials and methods to overcome those limitations.

Problems of time management and priority setting are also evident in the data. Not only did learners fail to set achievable goals and strike a balance between the efforts that they put into achieving each goal, they also felt uncomfortable about the deviations from their original plans. Despite the relatively low frequency of occurrence of these themes, they were consistently raised by learners throughout the data collection process. It

seems that the learners' poor mastery of meta-cognitive skills was a key barrier to their development and internalization of self-regulation. Learners' comments about enhancement of learning skills as a result of autonomous learning were found in the written evaluations. Instead of expecting substantive improvement in the English language over a semester of autonomous learning, the learners were glad to learn about and practice autonomous learning as a supplement and/or alternative to the traditional mode of learning.

Although the theme "enhancing learning skills" was not frequently mentioned in the learners' "positive comments on and autonomous learning, the category of "improved learning skills" as a result of became the most frequently-mentioned item when the learners were asked to describe their gains from autonomous learning. It is clear that the learners gained the rationale for and techniques of autonomous learning instead of the language per se. This is encouraging because the impact of acquiring autonomous learning skills¹ will probably be extended to the development of lifelong skills in all aspects of life. Learners also reported in their evaluations that the needs analysis and goal-setting exercises in the course had enabled them to better understand their own weaknesses and more actively seek relevant learning resources. Some learners also reported that their level of motivation, awareness of the importance of autonomous learning and self-discipline for and autonomous learning had increased as a result of having more focused targets to achieve in a given period of time.

LEARNERS' ATTITUDES TOWARDS AUTONOMOUS LANGUAGE LEARNING

The responses of successful and less successful users of autonomous learning to two statements regarding their attitudes were significantly different. The first finding highlights the importance of having a clear objective in learning English in order for learners to commit themselves to taking control of their learning. The second finding indicates that self-correction was not common among the learners regardless of their levels of success in autonomous learning, but the successful users of SALL and autonomous learning were relatively more active in correcting the own errors in their writing than their less successful counterparts.

The second finding is supported by the learners' responses to the rank-order questions regarding their preferences for the sources of feedback. About half percent out of hundred percent of the learners considered feedback from themselves (usually in the form of self-correction) to be the least useful. They largely depended on their teachers for feedback and correction of errors. Several comments were also made by individuals who doubted the legitimacy of self-assessment and self-correction in autonomous learning. They made comments like:

¹ Autonomous learning skills refer to learners' ability to be active and independent in analyzing needs, identifying goals, formulating goals, changing goals to suit their own needs and interests, making use of various learning strategies, and monitoring and reflecting on their own learning.

Teachers have the professional knowledge about English... Their comments are more reliable... I don't know what mistakes I've made and how to correct them when I'm asked to assess my own work... I simply don't have the skills to do it well.

These findings clearly indicate that the learners' attitudes toward self-assessment were rather negative and their confidence in taking charge of assessing their own work was low.

In addition, some themes related to the learners' perceptions of autonomous learning emerged from the learners' written evaluation. These perceptions impeded the learners' motivation in committing themselves to the autonomous learning program. Some learners often felt frustrated when they could not see much improvement in their language skills after weeks of hard work. In other words, their needs for skill development and competence were not fulfilled in the learning process. Most of the learners attributed this problem to the course being too short for them to implement a more comprehensive language improvement scheme. As students of various science disciplines, the learners are used to obtaining concrete, immediate outcomes in their studies such as mathematical equations, numerical findings of experiments and observable chemical reactions. On the contrary, language learning is less observable and immediate as far as the effect is concerned. The learners pointed out such a difference and expressed their concern over the lack of objective measures of learning outcomes in autonomous learning, for example:

I have problems with assessing my own progress. Sometimes after watching movies or chatting with friends in English, you'll ask yourself how much you've learned. It's a difficult question because it takes a long time to see the effects of your learning and the outcomes are sometimes immeasurable.

They were uncertain about where they were, how much they had progressed and how far they could go beyond their current abilities. According to the learners, this was especially true for listening and speaking among the four language skills. The vague and unquantifiable learning outcomes which were not compatible with their value and belief systems turned the learners away.

The learners' frustration can be explained by the conceptions of *ZPD* and *optimal challenge* (Vygotsky 1978, Deci and Ryan 1980). As they failed to see any significant amount of stretch of their personal abilities, their intrinsic motivation could not be sustained over time. In other words, if the correspondence between the action and the consequences of that action is absent, learners are not likely to be motivated.

LEARNING EXPERIENCE AND LERNER AUTONOMY

The results showed that significant differences were found for most of the items in the past language learning experiences section between the successful and less successful users of autonomous learning the mean scores for those items were much higher for the successful users. Such differences reveal that the past language experiences of the

successful users of autonomous learning were more autonomy-supportive than those of the less successful users.

These findings indicate that the experience of taking control of the method, medium, content and strategy of learning makes a difference between self-regulated and other regulated learners. Self-regulated learners usually had more positive experiences of language learning while less self-regulated learners tended to recall experiences which were the opposite. Self-regulated learners made comments like:

When I was in primary school, I was asked to rote-learn vocabulary and verb forms. It's so boring and I didn't like English at that time... Later in my secondary school, we learned English through drama and the teachers gave us a lot of freedom in deciding what to do in class. My classmates and I were excited about the English class... We suggested some activities to the teachers and we all enjoyed participating... I think all these have motivated me to learn English.

Data indicate that non-traditional ways of language learning such as drama, video, fiction and games were appealing to many learners and seemed to help them gain confidence in regulating their own learning. On the contrary, a traditional approach to language teaching and learning did not seem to contribute to learners' development of autonomous learning, for example:

My English classes were all about grammar exercises, examination past papers, textbooks and stuff like that. Teachers asked us to do this and that and we just followed. We didn't have a say...but we'd got used to it.

It is clear that the learners' past language experiences play a vital role in developing motivation and self-regulatory orientation. By the same logic, the learners' present experiences of autonomous learning are probably crucial for their future development of autonomous learning.

SOCIAL SETTING AND LEARNER AUTONOMY

The surrounding social practices which were implicated in the learners' attempts to exercise self-regulation were identified in the written evaluations. Comments made by the learners in their written evaluations with regard to their interactions with the social setting can be categorized as to positive or negative. The latter outweigh the former.

Eight individual instances of positive comments were found in the written evaluations. Those learners pointed out that the atmosphere had made them feel relaxed and free to explore the language materials at their own pace. They observed that though the atmosphere was relaxing, the users there all showed a serious attitude toward their learning, thus creating positive peer pressure among the users. In addition to the atmospheric factors, the users of the consultation service found that the language consultants were patient and helpful, and such encounters had reinforced their

determination to improve their English. The daily Discussion Group² was another language practice activity that most participants found stimulating and interactive. These observations showed that the interaction between the users and its social setting enabled the learners to put continued effort into autonomous learning. Negative comments about outweigh the positive ones by almost double. Negative comments were mostly concerned with the learners' dissatisfaction with the inadequacy of supporting facilities such as photocopiers, and the recency of the learning materials.

The number of comments (positive and negative) is insignificantly small and this is because a majority of learners chose to complete their autonomous work elsewhere. Data from the written evaluations show that the convenience brought by information technology had motivated the learners to learn English on their own because the learning materials were more easily accessible on the Internet. They made comments like:

I usually work at home in the middle of the night using the Internet resources... There are loads of useful materials online and I can use them anytime anywhere... no time limit.

Another learner made a similar remark in his written evaluation about his increased motivation as a result of the accessibility of learning materials such as grammar books and exercises at home. From a critical perspective, the absence of the local constraints imposed by the surrounding social environment on the exercise of self-motivational resources would encourage an individual to exert control over the acquisition of symbolic cultural capital such as language.

The learners, at different points during the semester, complained about the workload of their core subjects in and expressed concerns about the problem of finding time for autonomous learning. Some of them admitted that they had to cram at the end of the semester to produce autonomous learning records and evidence. They confessed that given the fixed amount of time available for their studies, they gave their core subjects higher priorities. As stated by one member,

I have taken more courses in Year 2 and there are so many assignments, lab work and tests. I can hardly find time to do SALL especially during the second half of the semester. My core courses are always my top priorities. I will only do SALL when I'm free, but I'm busy all the time.

Other commitments in the learners' lives were also reported as a hindrance for and autonomous learning. In fact, autonomous learning was given a relatively low priority in most of the learners' weekly agenda. Based on the enabling and inhibiting factors

² Discussion Groups are part of the English Center's self-access program offered to students of the University, institutes, campus and etc who wish to improve their oral skills with other students in informal discussions of topic of their interest.

identified regarding learners' development of autonomous learning, below are the implications of the findings for future course-based autonomous learning programs.

LANGUAGE LEARNER STRATEGIES AND LEARNER AUTONOMY

Along with individual learner differences such as motivational types and levels, what learners consciously choose to do and the learning strategies they employ have been found to affect their learning process and the level of mastery achieved [Griffiths, "Strategies" (2001); Cohen and Macaro; Oxford (2003)]³. Language learner strategy research has focused on the role of learner agency and decision-making behavior but is still characterized by a lack of consensus as to what actually constitutes a language learner strategy and how it might be defined.⁴ As well as these issues of construct validity, this investigative field has also been beset by other problems such as a lack of rigorous research methodology and a variety of theoretical models (Grenfell and Macaro, 2003). Griffiths has offered a succinct recent definition combining key elements from the last thirty years of debate in strategy research which we consider appropriate for the purposes of our research focus in the current study: for her, language learner strategies are "Activities consciously chosen by learners for the purpose of regulating their own language learning" ("Strategies", 2001). This description encapsulates the key elements of strategies as "activities" (not just actions or mental processes) which are (partially or fully) "conscious" and which learners "choose" to deploy from their existing repertoire for the goal-oriented "purpose" of controlling or facilitating their language learning processes. A further research problem is posed by the fact that several classification schemes listing strategies and grouping them according to different types have been offered in the literature, the best known being those offered by O'Malley and Chamot and Oxford.⁵

In the current study we have used Oxford's classification scheme which divides language learner strategies into two main groups, (i) direct strategies which involve the manipulation of the *target language* (memory, cognitive and compensation strategies) and (ii) indirect strategies which are those which support and manage the "language learning process" (meta cognitive, affective and social strategies) (*Language*). One of the major findings in the learner-centered research addressing language learner strategies is that the strategies learners choose relate both to their short-term and long-term learning goals, as well as variables such as the learning context or individual learner differences. It seems that appropriate strategy use might not be a question of acquiring a comprehensive set of tried and tested techniques used by the "good language learner"

³ Language learner strategies were originally called "learning strategies," "learner strategies" or "language learning strategies," but the term "language learner strategies" was coined in June 2004 at a meeting at the University of Oxford of international scholars involved in strategy research in language learning.

⁴ See Cohen and Macaro for a comprehensive recent review of the last thirty years of strategy research and re-examination of key issues such as strategy instruction and research methods.

⁵ Oxford's revision of learner strategy research, *Teaching and Researching: Language Learning Strategies*, is published by the end of 2010.

which need to be used all the time and in all learning contexts, but more a question of learners learning to select, combine, and deploy those strategies which are suitable for the task in hand depending on factors such as level of competence, cognitive style or motivation; more effective learners are those who intentionally and systematically select and combine relevant strategies [Griffiths, "Strategies"; Cohen and Macaro; Cohen (2002)].

Strategies certainly seem to be more than study skills or effective learning techniques as they can also refer to sophisticated cognitive skills such as inferencing or deducing grammar patterns. Additionally, they seem to include the social and affective aspects of learning, as well as depend on the meta cognitive awareness of the learner, with Macaro suggesting that "although it is the range and combinations of all strategies that ineffective learners lack, it is the meta cognitive [...] strategies which seem to be the strategy types most lacking in the arsenal of less successful learners". However, more importantly for teacher-researchers, and thus the current project, is the fact that strategy use might be open to intervention, and strategy-based instruction has been found to positively affect learning (Rubin et al.; Oxbrow, 2002). The link between strategy use and motivation has also been addressed, especially since successful and highly motivated learners have been found to use a wider range of strategies, therefore it seems that motivation is an important aspect of self-regulation (Grenfell and Macaro, 1988). The question thus raised is whether motivation spurs strategy use, with motivation essential for successful strategy instruction, or whether appropriate strategy use leads to better language performance which in turn arouses and sustains motivation.⁶

Defining learner autonomy from methodological and psychological perspectives has taken up much of the research literature in this area since Holec's seminal report for the Council of Europe which described autonomy as "the ability to take charge of one's learning", with the autonomous learner potentially responsible for taking decisions concerning learning objectives and contents, and selecting appropriate learning techniques and methods as well as monitoring and evaluating their progress. While Holec's definition centers on the technical aspects of learning, Little has approached the concept of autonomy from a more psychological perspective, claiming autonomy to be "[...] a capacity—for detachment, critical reflection, decision-making, and independent action" (*Learner 4*, 1981).⁷ It is the second dimension of learner autonomy which we have aimed to develop in our own research project, as we wished to develop our learners' ability to reflect on their learning, select appropriate strategies, and develop their meta cognitive awareness as they learn to learn more effectively without the

⁶ See Oxford and Schramm for more detail concerning psychological views of strategies, motivation, and volition (55-57).

⁷ A third political dimension also exists, with Benson suggesting that "the content of learning should be freely determined by learners" (49).

constant guidance and monitoring of their instructors, a fundamental concern in the case of our beginning university students as they make the transition from teacher dependence to more self-directed learning. Effective learners have been found to be aware of their strengths and weaknesses, and therefore capable of developing autonomous control over their learning, but the challenge for practicing teachers and researchers is to provide support in response to the heterogeneity of their learners who display a range of “motivations, cultures, beliefs, learning strategies, styles and goals” (Cotterall, 1995).

The idea of support as an important element in developing learner autonomy is emphasized by Little (“Developing”, 1999) who promotes the interdependence of the cognitive and social-interactive dimensions of the learning process. Ushioda has also highlighted the socially mediated nature of motivation as a means to promote autonomy, involving learners in taking greater responsibility for their learning and regulating their motivation in line with their educational context (“Socializing,” “Person”). It is this relationship between the fostering of greater learner autonomy and motivation that we will focus on here.

DEVELOPING AUTONOMY IN LANGUAGE LEARNING AND SOCIALLY MEDIATED PROCESS

Learner beliefs do not exist in a vacuum. There is a direct relationship between an individual’s cognitive system and his or her interaction in social groups. In other words, an individual is not separable from social life (Vygotsky, 1987). Recognizing the importance of social interaction for learning as a result of the increasing interest of L2 scholars in socio-cultural theory, autonomy research over the past decade has acknowledged the fact that developing learner autonomy is concerned with both the individual and social interaction. Benson (1996) proposes the distinction between *individual* and *social* autonomy. The individual dimension of autonomy involves individual learning styles and strategies over collaborative learning whereas social autonomy pertains to awareness raising and learning generated by interaction, collaboration, individual reflection and experimentation. Social autonomy, the Vygotsky’s view and Vygotskian terms, emphasizes that “the development of a capacity for reflection and analysis, central to the development of learner autonomy, depends on the development and internalization of a capacity to participate fully and critically in social interactions” (1996). According to Vygotsky’s (1978) socio-cultural theory, learning is a socially mediated process in which higher-order cognitive functions are internalized as a result of social interaction with more competent others. To internalize an activity for independent action and self-regulation, one has to engage in a volitional process (Vygotsky, 1981), and in independent problem solving activities (Vygotsky, 1978) through the interactive support and scaffolding provided by teachers and more capable peers. In socio-cultural theory, the concept of the “zone of proximal development” (ZPD) is defined as:

The distance between actual development level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving

under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers. The concept of the ZPD is in line with the concept of “optimal challenge” in the sub-theory (cognitive evaluation theory) of Deci & Ryan’s (1980) self-determination theory which depicts the formation of intrinsic motivation as a cyclical process that allows individuals to progress by stretching their personal abilities by a small but significant amount each time, and promotes the learner’s perceptions of competence and skill development. Ushioda (2006) argues that “optimal challenges are those that lie within the zone of proximal development” if there is an attempt to integrate the concepts of socio-cultural theory and self-determination theory. (p. 284)

Ushioda (2003) calls for expansion of the unit of analysis in motivation research beyond the psychological perspective to take account of the interaction between the individual and the social setting. Teachers, undoubtedly, take the prime role of supporting learners’ motivation through building necessary scaffolds, and facilitating interactions in the classroom. Ushioda (2006a) raises a question about whether teachers and other surrounding social practices are implicated in “learners’ attempts to exercise self-motivation and take control of affective learning experience” (p. 287) on top of “the genesis and growth of individual motivation”. It is obvious that, from a pedagogical perspective, teachers play a crucial role in facilitating the development of effective motivational thinking through the process of giving feedback. Nevertheless, from a critical point of view, the possibility of exercising self-motivation and taking control of affective learning experience depends on the presence of “local constraints on the exercise of self-motivational resources.”

It is important to note that language learners and social contexts are not dichotomous (Norton, 2000). It would be a mistake to assume a distinction between learners who are “motivated and not motivated, introverted and extroverted, inhibited or uninhibited, without considering that such affective factors are frequently socially constructed in inequitable relations of power, changing over time and space, and possibly coexisting in contradictory ways” (p. 5). In the face of the constraints imposed by the socio-historically situated phenomena, Ushioda (2006a) posits that the “processes of engaging, constructing and negotiating identities are central to [the]... interface” (p. 289) between motivation and autonomy, and distinguishes *individual identity of self* and *social identity*.

“Integrativeness” in Gardner’s (1985) model has been reframed by L2 scholars as “an international posture” (Yashima, 2002), “an internal process of identification within the person’s self-concept” (Dörnyei, 2005) and “global citizenship” (Lamb, 2004) to represent individual identity of self. In contrast to individual identity of self where an individual has great control over his or her pursuit, social identity is “subject to conditions and constraints imposed by surrounding social practices” (Ushioda, 2006a). Norton (2000) describes social identity as “how a person understands his or her relationship to the world, how that relationship is constructed across time and space, and how the person understands possibilities for the future” (p. 5), and L2 motivation as the “investment” learners make which has the potential of increasing their cultural

capital, self-concept and identity, and aspirations with the acquisition of symbolic and material resources.

Exerting control over one's acquisition of symbolic capital, and construction and engagement of identity is subject to the constraints imposed by the surrounding social environment. Pedagogically speaking, Ushioda (2006a) points out the importance of creating an enabling environment for learners to "speak as themselves" (Legenhausen, 1999) and engage their identities so that they would be able to have a better understanding of their identities, aspirations and the ways of relating themselves to the social world inside and outside the classroom (Norton, 2000).

AUTONOMY IN SELF-ACCESS LANGUAGE LEARNING

An autonomy-supportive environment for learners to engage in activities that allow them to develop a capacity to control their learning (Benson, 2001) can be created both inside and outside the classroom. Self-access is an approach to learning language which has been widely recognized as an approach to promoting autonomy as it encourages learners to move from being teacher-dependent to autonomous (Gardner & Miller, 1999; Sheerin, 1991, 1997). It can take place either in self-access centers or be incorporated into language programs.

Gardner and Miller (1999) point out the possibility of incorporating self-access into language courses. Tsang (1999) adds that "language courses which incorporate a SALL and autonomous learning element seem to be a starting point... if moving toward a SALL-oriented and autonomous learning approach to language learning is not a realistic short-term goal" (p. 36). Several current attempts have been made to integrate self-access into courses of ESP/EAP (e.g., Fisher, Hafner, & Young, 2007; Gardner, 2007; Nunan, 1996; Toogood & Pemberton, 2002). Success was reported in Gardner's (2007) attempt to increase individualization of learners as represented by their positive attitudes towards SALL and the notion of choice in SALL, the diversity of learning goals set and content adopted in SALL, and learners' satisfaction of the achievement of their learning goals. Toogood and Pemberton (2002) also reported that their three attempts to integrate self-directed learning into the curriculum were reasonably successful in meeting student needs for both free choice and support.

In an EAP program where learners were given opportunities to control their learning, Nunan (1996) contends that such power transfer from the teachers to the learner can increase the awareness of, and sensitivity to, the learning process over time. Elsewhere, Nunan (1999) highlights the importance of goal-setting and learner choice in encouraging learner independence. The switch of control over one's learning from the teacher to the learner in the case of curriculum-based self-access does not mean absolute independence. Little (1990) points out that "as social beings our independence is always balanced by dependence; total detachment is a principal determining feature not of autonomy but of autism" (p. 7). Voller (1997) argues along the same line that interdependence is crucial to the development of autonomy, and Boud (1988) states

that independence entails “an unavoidable dependence at one level on authorities for information and guidance” (p. 29).

In that regard, classroom teachers who attempt to integrate SALL and autonomous learning into the curriculum have an important role to play in fostering learners' autonomy and “in launching learners into self-access and in lending them a regular helping hand to ‘stay afloat’” (Sheerin, 1997). According to Voller (1997), teachers have three major roles in autonomy-supportive classrooms: 1) facilitator, 2) counselor, and 3) resource. Sheerin (1997), however, warns the teachers of the danger of over-advising and under-advising if they are “ill-prepared” and “ill-equipped” for such roles. To help teachers prepare better for their new roles in the classroom when SALL and autonomous learning is an integral part of the curriculum, it is essential for them to understand their learners' motivation to engage in SALL and autonomous learning and how far the integration of SALL and autonomous learning into the curriculum affects learners' motivation to develop their capacity for taking control of their own learning.

In the existing body of literature on autonomy and motivation, research has been focused mostly on autonomy and motivation in relation to specific skills of language learning such as writing e.g. (Deng, 2007) and (Zhao, 2007) and vocabulary (e.g., Dam & Legenhausen, 1996), knowledge about the language system (e.g., Allan, 1997), examination preparation (e.g., Barrett-Lennard, 1997), and strategy use (e.g., Schmidt & Watanabe, 2001; Simmons, 1996; Wenden, 1995; White, 1995; Victori & Lockhart, 1995). Studies of learners' perceptions of autonomous learning have dominated the existing autonomy research (e.g., Broady, 1996; Chavali, 2001; Cheung, 2005; Cotterall, 1995; Fazey & Fazey, 2001; Pill, 2001; Reinders, 2000; St John, 1988; To, 2005). Yet little work has been done in putting motivation and autonomous learning together in the context of SALL and autonomous learning being an integral part of a language course. In addition, although there have been some attempts to explore how various motivation-related variables were related to success and failure in language learning (e.g., Nikolov, 2001; Yap, 1998), those studies were not specific to the self-access learning context where learning takes place outside the classroom. Furthermore, motivation and autonomous learning are individual as well as social behaviors which require interaction with the significant others and other surrounding social practices.

CONCLUSION

Concerning the autonomous learning and its discussed principles, my study was an attempt to analyze and discover every aspects of this issue. The research findings are in favor of the principles of autonomous learning. Although recent studies on the principles of autonomous learning have approved its advantages, the applicability of autonomous learning in both EFL and ESL educational contexts remains a controversy among experts in the field. Differences of EFL and ESL educational contexts should be analyzed to better notice the challenges of applying autonomous learning in practice. Actually, this was the main concern behind composing this paper, so that I presented the principles and all aspects of autonomous learning to help the teachers to use them authentically in the EFL/ESL contexts.

According to Cotteral (1995), learner independence was correlated with successful language learning and learners who subscribed to this view of language learning were believed to be autonomous. Moreover, according to Dickinson (1995), learners with a high level of motivation and confidence were expected to be autonomous and autonomous learners were intrinsically motivated. Developing positive self-efficacy beliefs is thus helpful in launching learners into autonomous learning. There are some basic differences between successful users of autonomous learning in their past language learning experiences, identified self-efficacy. However, the gaps can be bridged by offering more intensive meta-cognitive strategies training and teacher feedback.

In addition to the all discussed factors, contextual factors such as course assessment and physical learning support; psychological factors, for example, laziness, lack of interest and sense of coercion; and social factors, for instance, peer support and competition and teacher guidance all contribute to the enhancement or inhibition of learners' autonomy.

The findings discusses the implication for the implementation of the SALL and autonomous learning program and the ways of autonomous learning in the curriculum. The learners' accounts of the factors that hindered SALL and autonomous learning shed light on the needs for a more conducive social environment for SALL and autonomous learning, learner strategy training, and a reform of the design of SALL and autonomy programs. Also this study corporate the students toward below abilities which contain remarkable implications:

1. Learning Content-based SALL and autonomous learning program for communicative purposes.
2. Creating opportunities for internalization of personally-valued behaviors into self-concept.
3. Creating SALL and autonomous learning groups.
4. Creating a more conducive social environment for SALL and autonomous learning.
5. Learning and learner training and strategies toward self-directed learning.
6. Learning and using design of the SALL and autonomous learning program.

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