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Impact of Autonomous Learning on the Achievement Level of Students of IXth Grade

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Abstract-The word autonomy was derived from ancient Greek words *autonomia* and *nomos* which means "self" and "law" respectively, hence when combined understood to mean "one who gives oneself one's own law" is a concept found in moral, political, and bioethical philosophy". Within these contexts, it is the capacity of a rational individual to make an informed, uncoerced decision. In moral and political philosophy, autonomy is often used as the basis for determining moral responsibility and accountability for one's actions. One of the best known philosophical theories of autonomy was developed by Kant. In medicine, respect for the autonomy of patients is an important goal, though it can conflict with a competing ethical principle, namely beneficence. Autonomy is also used to refer to the self-government of the people. This paper is an attempt to understand how this concept of autonomy actually works with students, how the students' performance is influenced with the concept of autonomy.

Keywords-Autonomy, education, performance, memorizing, language learning.

I. INTRODUCTION

From past decades **learner autonomy** has been an alarming wording foreign language education, especially with regard to lifelong learning skills. It has not transformed the old practices in the language classroom but has given foundation to self-access language learning centers around the world such as the SALC at Kanda University of International Studies in Japan, the ASLLC at The Hong Kong Institute of Education, the SAC at Hong Kong University of Science and Technology and ELSAC at the University of Auckland. As the result of such practices, language teaching is now seen as language learning and it has placed the learner as the center of our attention in language learning education.

The term "learner autonomy" was first coined in 1981 by Henri Holec, the "father" of learner autonomy. Many definitions have since been given to the term, depending on the writer, the context, and the level of debate educators have come to. It has been considered as a personal human trait, as a political measure, or as an educational move. This is because autonomy is seen either (or both) as a means or as an end in education.

Definitions:

- According to **Henri Holec**, 'Autonomy is the ability to take charge of one's own learning'.
- According to **David Little**, 'Autonomy is essentially a matter of the learner's psychological relation to the process and content of learning'.
- According to **Leslie Dickinson**, 'Autonomy is a situation in which the learner is totally responsible for all the decisions concerned with his [or her] learning and the implementation of those decisions'.
- According to **Phil Benson**, 'Autonomy is recognition of the rights of learners within educational systems'.
- According to **Deci**, 'Autonomy is a basic human need. An autonomous person is one who has an independent capacity to make and carry out choices which govern his or her actions.'
- According to **Candy**, 'Learning is not simply a matter of rote memorization; it is a constructive process that involves actively seeking meaning from events.'
- According to **Leni Dam** defines autonomy in terms of the learner's willingness and capacity to control or oversee her own learning. She holds that someone qualifies as an autonomous learner when he independently choose aims and purposes and sets goals; choose methods and tasks; exercises choice and purpose in organizing and carrying out the

chosen tasks; and chooses criteria for evaluation. Autonomous learners draw their intrinsic motivation when they accept responsibility for their own learning; and success in learning strengthens their intrinsic motivation.

One of the key aspects to consider in defining Learner Autonomy is whether we view it as a means to an end (learning a foreign language) or as an end in itself (making people autonomous learners). These two options do not exclude each other, both of them can be part of our views towards language learning or learning in general.

- According to Frank Lacey the principles of learner autonomy could be:
- Autonomy means moving the focus from teaching to learning.
- Autonomy affords maximum possible influence to the learners.
- Autonomy encourages the need for peer support and cooperation.
- Autonomy means making use of self/peer assessment.
- Autonomy requires and ensures 100% differentiation.
- Autonomy can only be practiced with student logbooks which are a documentation of learning and a tool of reflection.
- The role of the teacher as supporting scaffolding and creating room for the development of autonomy is very demanding and very important.
- Autonomy means empowering students, yet the classroom can be restrictive, so are the rules of chess or tennis, but the use of technology can take students outside of the structures of the classroom, and the students can take the outside world into the classroom.

Why learner autonomy is important?

When the learners set the agenda, learning is more focused and purposeful, and thus more effective both immediately and in the longer term (Little, 1991; Holec, 1981; Dickinson, 1987). Precisely because autonomous learners are self-motivated and reflective learners, their learning is efficient and effective. Learners who are involved in making choices and decisions about the aspects of the learning programs are also likely to feel more secure in their learning (Joiner, cited in McCafferty, 1981). Moreover learners become more active and efficient in their language learning if they don't have to spend time waiting for the teacher to provide them with the resources or solve their problems. A very obvious reason for promoting learner autonomy is that teacher may not always be available to guide or instruct. Hence learners need to be both self-motivated and self-independent.

Conditions for Learner Autonomy

It should be reiterated that autonomy is not an article of faith, a product readymade for use or merely a personal quality or trait. Rather, it should be clarified that autonomous learning is achieved when certain conditions obtain: cognitive and meta cognitive strategies on the part of the learner, motivation, attitudes, and knowledge about language learning, i.e., a kind of meta-language. To acknowledge, however, that learners have to follow certain paths to attain autonomy is tantamount to asserting that there has to be a teacher on whom it will be incumbent to show the way. In other words, autonomous learning is by no means "teacher less learning." As Sheerin (1997, cited in Benson & Voller, 1997: 63) succinctly puts it, 'teachers have a crucial role to play in launching learners into self-access and in lending them a regular helping hand to *stay afloat*'

Probably, giving students a "helping hand" may put paid to learner autonomy, and this is mainly because teachers are ill-prepared or reluctant to 'wean students away from teacher dependence' (Sheerin, 1997, cited in Benson & Voller, 1997: 63). After all, 'it is not easy for teachers to change their role from purveyor of information to counselor and manager of learning resources. And it is not easy for teachers to let learners solve problems for themselves' (Little, 1990, cited in Gathercole, 1990: 11). Such a transition from teacher-control to learner-control is fraught with difficulties but it is mainly in relation to the former (no matter how unpalatable this may sound) that the latter finds its expression. At any rate, learner-control which is ancillary to autonomy is not a single, unitary concept, but rather a continuum along which various instructional situations may be placed (Candy, 1991: 205). It is of utmost importance to gain insights into the strategies learners use in grappling with the object of enquiry, i.e., the target language, as well as their motivation and attitude towards language learning in general.

Learning Strategies

A central research project on learning strategies is the one surveyed in O'Malley and Chamot (1990). According to them, learning strategies are 'the special thoughts or behaviors that individuals use to help them comprehend, learn, or retain new information' (O'Malley and Chamot, 1990: 1, cited in Cook, 1993: 113) a definition in keeping with the one provided in Wenden (1998: 18): 'Learning strategies are mental steps or operations that learners use to learn a new language and to regulate their efforts to do so'. To a greater or lesser degree, the strategies and learning styles that someone adopts 'may partly reflect personal preference rather than innate endowment' (Skehan, 1998: 237). Briefly discussing some of the main learning strategies, refraining from mentioning communication or compensatory strategies:

Cognitive Strategies

According to O'Malley and Chamot (1990: 44), cognitive strategies 'operate directly on incoming information, manipulating it in ways that enhance learning'. Learners may use any or all of the following cognitive strategies (Cook, 1993: 114-115):

- repetition, when imitating others' speech;
- resourcing, i.e., having recourse to dictionaries and other materials;

- translation, that is, using their mother tongue as a basis for understanding and/or producing the target language;
- note-taking;
- deduction, i.e., conscious application of L2 rules;
- contextualization, when embedding a word or phrase in a meaningful sequence;
- transfer, that is, using knowledge acquired in the L1 to remember and understand facts and sequences in the L2;
- inference, when matching an unfamiliar word against available information (a new word etc);
- question for clarification, when asking the teacher to explain, etc.

Meta-cognitive Strategies

According to Wenden (1998: 34), 'metacognitive knowledge includes all facts learners acquire about their own cognitive processes as they are applied and used to gain knowledge and acquire skills in varied situations'. In a sense, metacognitive strategies are skills used for planning, monitoring, and evaluating the learning activity; 'they are strategies about learning rather than learning strategies themselves' (Cook, 1993: 114).

Some of these strategies

- Directed attention, when deciding in advance to concentrate on general aspects of a task;
- Selective attention, paying attention to specific aspects of a task;
- Self-monitoring, i.e., checking one's performance as one speaks;
- Self-evaluation, i.e., appraising one's performance in relation to one's own standards;
- Self-reinforcement, rewarding oneself for success.

At the planning stage, also known as pre-planning (Wenden, 1998: 27), learners identify their objectives and determine how they will achieve them. Planning, however, may also go on while a task is being performed. This is called planning-in-action. Here, learners may change their objectives and reconsider the ways in which they will go about achieving them. At the monitoring stage, language learners act as 'participant observers or overseers of their language learning' (ibid.), asking themselves, "How am I doing?" "Am I having difficulties with this task?" and so on. Finally, when learners evaluate, they do so in terms of the outcome of their attempt to use a certain strategy.

According to Wenden (1998: 28), evaluating involves three steps:

- 1) Learners examine the outcome of their attempts to learn;
- 2) They access the criteria they will use to judge it; and
- 3) They apply it.

Learner Attitudes and Motivation

Language learning is not merely a cognitive task. Learners do not only reflect on their learning in terms of the language input to which they are exposed, or the optimal strategies they need in order to achieve the goals they set. Rather, the success of a learning activity is, to some extent, contingent upon learners' stance towards the world and the learning activity in particular, their sense of self, and their desire to learn (Benson & Voller, 1997: 134-136). As Candy (1991: 295-296) says, 'the *how* and *what*' of learning are intimately interwoven. The overall approach a learner adopts will significantly influence the shape of his or her learning outcomes' (my italics). In other words, language learning--as well as learning, in general--has also an affective component.

'Meeting and interiorizing the grammar of a foreign language is not simply an intelligent, cognitive act. It is a highly affective one too (Rinvoluceri, 1984: 5, cited in James & Garrett, 1991: 13). Gardner and Macintyre (1993: 1, cited in Graham, 1997: 92) define 'affective variables' as the 'emotionally relevant characteristics of the individual that influence how she/he will respond to any situation'. Other scholars, such as Shumann (1978) and Larsen-Freeman and Long (1991) attach less importance to learners' emotions, claiming that 'social and psychological factors' give a more suitable description for students' reactions to the learning process. Amongst the social and affective variables at work, self-esteem and desire to learn are deemed to be the most crucial factors 'in the learner's ability to overcome occasional setbacks or minor mistakes in the process of learning a second [or foreign] language' (Tarone & Yule, 1989: 139). Therefore, it is necessary to shed some light on learner attitudes and motivation.

Wenden (1998: 52) defines attitudes as 'learned motivations, valued beliefs, evaluations, what one believes is acceptable, or responses oriented towards approaching or avoiding'. For her, two kinds of attitudes are crucial: attitudes learners hold about their role in the learning process, and their capability as learners (ibid: 53). In a sense, attitudes are a form of metacognitive knowledge. At any rate, 'learner beliefs about their role and capability as learners will be shaped and maintained--by other beliefs they hold about themselves as learners' (ibid.: 54). For example, if learners believe that certain personality types cannot learn a foreign language and they believe that they are that type of person, and then they will think that they are fighting a "losing battle," as far as learning the foreign language is concerned. Furthermore, if learner's labor under the misconception that learning is successful only within the context of the "traditional classroom," where the teacher directs, instructs, and manages the learning activity, and students must follow in the teacher's footsteps, they are likely to be impervious or resistant to learner-centered strategies aiming at autonomy, and success is likely to be undermined.

In a way, attitudes are 'part of one's perception of self, of others, and of the culture in which one is living [or the culture of the target language]' (Brown, 1987: 126), and it seems clear that positive attitudes are conducive to increased motivation, while negative attitudes have the opposite effect. But let us examine the role of motivation.

Although the term 'motivation' is frequently used in educational contexts, there is little agreement among experts as to its exact meaning. What most scholars seem to agree on, though, is that motivation is 'one of the key factors that influence the rate and success of second or foreign language (L2) learning. Motivation provides the primary impetus to initiate learning the L2 and later

the driving force to sustain the long and often tedious learning process' (Dornyei, 1998: 117). According to Gardner and MacIntyre (1993: 3), motivation is comprised of three components: 'desire to achieve a goal, effort extended in this direction, and satisfaction with the task'.

It is manifest that in language learning, people are motivated in different ways and to different degrees. Some learners like doing grammar and memorizing; others want to speak and role-play; others prefer reading and writing, while avoiding speaking. Furthermore, since '[the learning of a foreign language] involves an alteration in self-image, the adoption of new social and cultural behaviors and ways of being, and therefore has a significant impact on the social nature of the learner' (Williams, 1994: 77, cited in Dornyei, 1998:122), an important distinction should be made between instrumental and integrative motivation. Learners with an instrumental orientation view the foreign language as a means of finding a good job or pursuing a lucrative career; in other words, the target language acts as a 'monetary incentive' (Gardner &MacIntyre, 1993: 3). On the other hand, learners with an integrative orientation are interested in the culture of the target language; they want to acquaint themselves with the target community and become integral parts of it. Of course, this approach to motivation has certain limitations (see Cookes and Schmidt, 1991, cited in Lier, 1996: 104-105), but an in-depth analysis is not within the purview of this study. The bottom line is that motivation is 'a central mediator in the prediction of language achievement' (Gardner &MacIntyre, 1993: 3), as various studies have shown (see Kraemer, 1990; Machnick and Wolfe, 1982; et al.).

Self-esteem

Closely related to attitudes and motivation is the concept of self-esteem, that is, the evaluation the learner makes of herself with regard to the target language or learning in general. Self-esteem is a personal judgment of worthiness that is expressed in the attitudes that the individual holds towards himself (Coopersmith, 1967: 4-5, cited in Brown, 1987: 101-102). If the learner has a 'robust sense of self', to quote Breen and Mann (1997, cited in Benson &Voller, 1997: 134), his relationship to himself as a learner is unlikely to be marred by any negative assessments by the teacher. Conversely, a lack of self-esteem is likely to lead to negative attitudes towards his capability as a learner, and to 'a deterioration in cognitive performance', thus confirming his view of himself as incapable of learning (Diener and Dweck, 1978, 1980, cited in Wenden, 1998: 57).

To say, though, that learner autonomy can be fostered is not to reduce it to a set of skills that need to be acquired. Rather, it is taken to mean that the teacher and the learner can work towards autonomy by creating a friendly atmosphere characterized by 'low threat, unconditional positive regard, honest and open feedback, respect for the ideas and opinions of others, approval of self-improvement as a goal, collaboration rather than competition' (Candy, 1991: 337).

What technology can provide?

Technology offers a great deal on the linguistic side: huge amounts of data, including authentic text, graphics, audio, and video online. Software and online exercises can provide rules to begin with or as glosses for data. Focus on Grammar is one example of a program that has something for both deductive and inductive learners. A few major software packages, such as DynEd and ELLIS series, offer a structured path through their material and record keeping. Another area where computers are useful is in providing practice in various ways. While the practice is often repetitive, much more is possible. Variety and playfulness of language games improve the fun factor. Concordances allow learners to explore language and develop their own hypotheses for how language works, based on large text bases. Technology provides tools for learners to create newsletters, web pages, and multimedia presentations, as well as to create online communities of interest.

What's missing?

While productive practice is possible, repetition is easier to automate and so is far more prevalent in both software and online activities. A curricular path that links past with present information and helps learners self-assess is rarely found outside of software, and not frequently in software, either. Very little of what is available in off-the-shelf form develops learners' meta cognitive skills, helping them understand how to learn and how to be reflective learners. Very importantly, ready-made technology solutions rarely provide any engagement with the local community. It is up to facilitators and teachers to make the links between what the learner is doing independently and what is going on in the classroom or the home.

Other drawbacks exist, as well. A concern frequently expressed in the hypertext literature is that learners can get lost when working through material with hypertext links. Given a wealth of choices, learners can feel overwhelmed and unable to decide what to do. Aimless clicking often results. Repetitive practice or a repetitive interface can be boring. A special risk for ESL children is that they will be plugged into a machine instead of a group in class. They can benefit from language software, certainly, but have other needs as well. Technology can provide too simple a solution.

Statement of the problem: Impact of autonomous learning on the achievement level of students of IX th grade.

Objectives

- To find out the impact of autonomous learning on the achievement levels of students of directed and individualized groups.

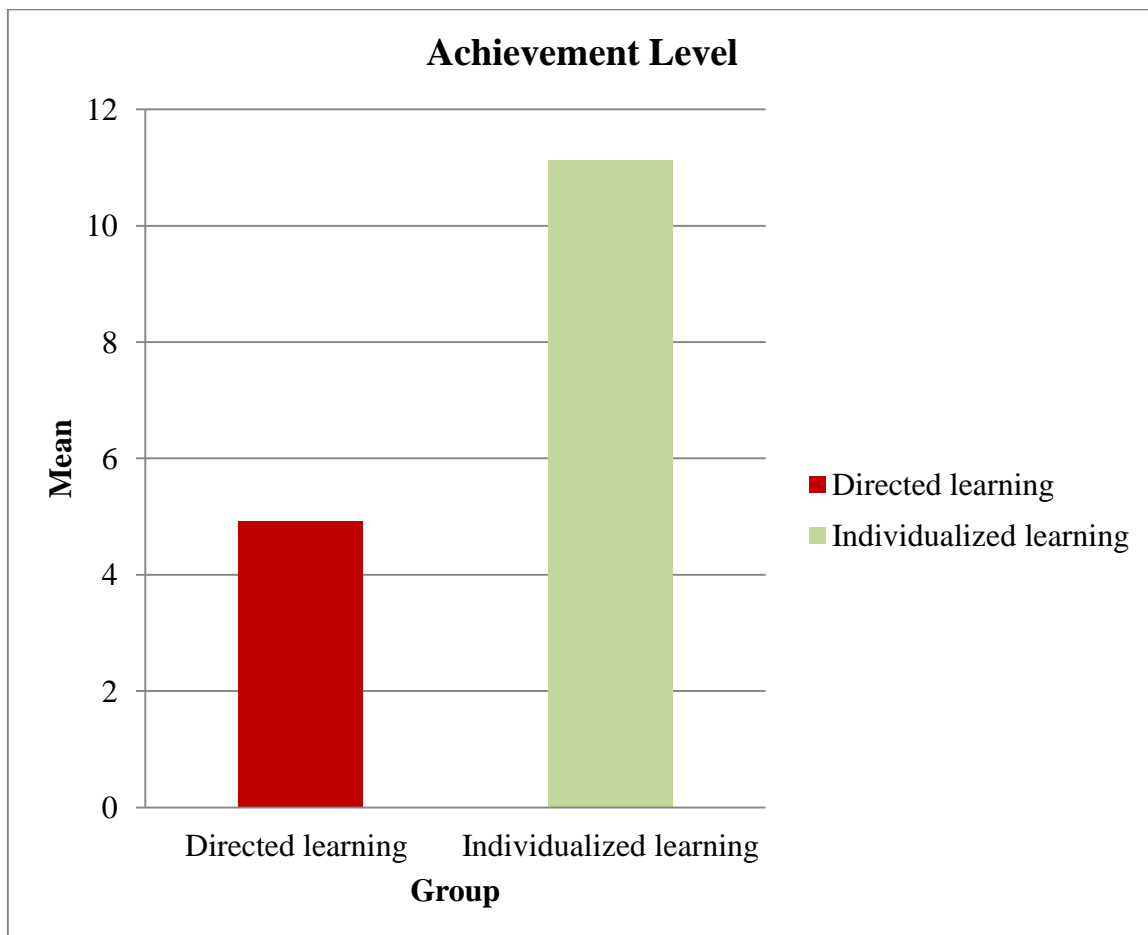
Method

The researcher studied the students of both directed learning group and individualized learning group for the impact with the help of a criterion test. Students from the both groups were taught English pronunciation basics through language lab. One group was guided completely by the teacher for a week and the other group was provided only the instructions in the beginning. After a week a test based on the content learned by the students was conducted for both the groups. There were 125 students in both the group.

Result: After the test it was found that the students from the Individualized group showed better results than the directed group.

Table 1: Showing the computation of critical ratio between Directed learning group and Individualized learning group Students with respect to their level of achievement.

Group	Mean	S.D.	C.R.	Level of Significance	N
Directed Learning	4.92	2.39	22.14	Significant at 0.01 Level	125
Individualized Learning	11.12	2.29			125



The level of achievement of the individualized learning group students has been found significantly higher than that of their directed learning group counterparts. Hence, autonomous learning plays a significant role in fostering effective learning levels of the students.

EDUCATIONAL IMPLICATIONS

In the light of the conclusions or findings of the present study the investigator has suggested the following steps to be taken in education with the view to make the language learning autonomous :-

- 1) Teachers and learners should aspire and expect achievements of realistic goals.
- 2) Reward the child for showing independence.
- 3) Teachers should give more attention, time and energy for framing autonomous learning opportunities for the students so that they may be educationally benefited to a larger extent.
- 4) Various types of co-curricular activities suitable to the age, interest and abilities of students should also be organized in the school which will make the students autonomous learner and proficient in language learning.

SUGGESTIONS

While completing the present research work the investigator has come across with problems which have not been explored or investigated for. Therefore, the investigator suggests the following areas and variables related with the present study on which the further researches work be conducted. The present study cannot be called final or comprehensive. More work can be done on different samples of different age groups:-

- a) Same study can be conducted on the large scale or at the national level.
- b) Level of intelligence of autonomous learners can also be studied.
- c) Role of teachers and school administration in developing autonomous learning through language laboratory in students can be studied.
- d) Effect of socio – economic status, caste, community and locality on the level of achievement of the autonomous learners can be studied.
- e) A comparative study of factors related with autonomous learning in different states of India can also be studied.
- f) New methods and techniques for making language learning autonomous for students should be identified.

CONCLUSION

Succinctly we can state that from past two decades, the concepts of learner autonomy and independence have gained momentum, the former becoming a 'buzz-word' within the context of language learning. It is a genuine fact that the most important aspect of communicatively oriented language learning and teaching plays the vital role for learners in language learning process. The responsibility from teachers to learners does not exist in a vacuum, but is the result of a concatenation of changes to the curriculum itself towards a more learner-centered kind of learning. What is more, this reshaping, so to speak, of teacher and learner roles has been conducive to a radical change in the age-old distribution of power and authority that used to plague the traditional classroom. In the classrooms, learners should be equipped with the tools for their own learning, while the teacher guides and provides support. Listening, speaking, comprehension projects which could be helped by the use of audio cassettes, videos, television, writing and writing correction programmes, can now be fruitfully be done with computers.

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