Teachers' Perception on Developing Autonomous Learners within a Classroom

[1]Dr.B.Sivakami, [2]Ms. K.Abinaya, [3]Dr.Saradha Rajkumar
[1]Asst.Prof. of English(Grade2), Vellore Institute of Technology Chennai,Chennai-600127
[2]Ph.D Researcher, Department of English, Annamalai University, Chidambaram
[3]Prof. of English, Vellore Institute of Technology Chennai,Chennai-600127

Abstract

Learner autonomy involves readiness on the part of learners to take responsibility for their own learning. It enables learners to learn effectively and for effective teaching and learning to take place, teachers need to equip themselves with strategies of promoting autonomy. Therefore, it is essential to look into English language teachers' beliefs about learner autonomy to be able to promote it in language learning situation. The present study aims to investigate willingness of teachers and prospective teachers (research scholars of English) in granting autonomy to learners within the class. The paper reports on the research findings of the study carried out with 42 English teachers working in various institutions across the state, Tamil Nadu. The study focuses on a few important aspects of learner autonomy comprising the choice of topic for class discussion and assignment, teaching strategy and group of students and the responsibility learners assume for their own learning. The collected data are analyzed and interpreted using statistical analysis to find out the willingness on the part of teachers and teachers-to-be to allow learners to become autonomous learners.

Keywords: *second language learning, learner autonomy, teachers' beliefs, learning strategies, effective learning.*

I. INTRODUCTION

To be a successful learner, each learner has to "make decisions for themselves about what they should be learning and how they should be learning it" (Boud, 2005). The research focuses on the willingness of teachers and would-be teachers (research scholars of English) in granting autonomy to learners within the class. Some of the aspects focused in the article include the choice of topic for class discussion and assignment, teaching strategy and group of students, and the responsibility learners assume for their own learning.

"Learner autonomy cannot exist without the possibility to make choices about learning. Choices can be made on multiple levels ranging from what activity to do first to taking part in course design"(Pichugova et al., 2016). As autonomy involves a readiness on the part of learners to take responsibility for their own learning, teachers can focus on offering choices to learners and try to have some knowledge about their learning styles. For effective teaching and learning to take place, learners can be offered choices in enabling them to learn, in the tasks they do, and in choosing the strategies for them. Besides, teachers can also encourage their learners to become aware of their own learning styles which can assist them in choosing the suitable learning tasks for them, in monitoring their performance, and in evaluating their learning.

Henry Holec (1981) defines autonomy as "the ability to take responsibility for his own learning"(Keengwe, 2015). Learners' abilities develop when they take responsibility for their learning. At the same time, as"meta-cognitive knowledge includes an awareness of what one is learning and the strategies one is employing, a piece of knowledge about the actual process of learning, and an ability to consciously manage and regulate the use of appropriate learning strategies" (Yuping,

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2017), learners need to "monitor and control" (Larkin, 2010) their own thinking to take responsibility for their learning. So, development of learners' meta-cognition significantly contributes to their autonomy. Learners tend to perform better when they are aware of their own mental processes, their ability to learn, monitor, evaluate, and regulate their learning processes. As Lihua Sun (2007) has put forth, employment of learning strategies, consciously or unconsciously, can lead to enhancement of learning efficiency. Also, researches reveal that high-achieving learners use meta-cognitive learning strategies more frequently than that of low-achieving learners.

Development of meta-cognition can lead to the development of planning, self-monitoring, and self-evaluating processes that greatly aid in learners' autonomy. Besides, Salimi and Ansari (2015) having investigated Iranian English teachers' beliefs on learner autonomy have also stated that "Self-monitoring and self-assessment in the process of learning are central to the development of learner autonomy". Therefore, self-monitoring and self-evaluation that significantly contribute to learners' autonomy emphasize on learners' ability to understand, correct, and avoid the making of mistakes while learning.

As Asiri and Nadia (2018) have suggested, teachers can assist their learners in constructing their own learning based on a series of experiences and events.

Learner autonomy also includes making use of appropriate learning strategies for effective learning. Therefore, teachers can encourage their learners to use learning strategies that suit their learning style and can equip themselves with strategies of promoting autonomy.

II.LITERATURE REVIEW

The review of related literature and studies reveals the benefits which learners receive out of autonomy granted to them.

In the article, "English Language Learning Strategies Reported by Advanced Language Learners" the authors emphasizes the need and efficacy of learner autonomy. Having conducted an empirical study with 20 student interpreters in the graduate school of interpretation and translation, they have proven that metacognitive strategies in collaboration with instructional activities can contribute to successful language learning and promote learner autonomy (Lee and Heinz, 2016).

Hu and Jiaxiu (2017) in their article titled, "A pathway to learner autonomy: a self-determination theory perspective" have stated that integrating the need-satisfying action program (the APLA) in English course education set an effective pathway to fostering and improving learners' ability of autonomous learning. Having conducted an action research, they have found that the students' progress in learner autonomy was consistent with the fulfilment of their innate needs.

Patrick O. Mose (2019) through his study presents personal interests, personal mentorship, and motivation as the three major components that promote learner autonomy. Furthermore, the author highlights the role of technology which presents learner-centered models of learning. It also ascertains the efficacy of web 2.0 tools and applications in promoting learner autonomy. The study also exposes the significance of social networking sites namely Twitter, Skype, Voice Thread, Blogger, Socrative, Facebook, and iMovie in effective teaching and learning.

In a multiple-case study of four participants with a mixed method research design, Veronika (2017) emphasises the significance of Program for Intentional Learning (PIL). She throws light on PIL – related learning namely attending workshops, study groups, and completing study plans that foster learner autonomy. Specifically, the study puts forth metacognitive skills as the most effective one that promotes learner autonomy.

Hoi Wing Chan (2012) has stressed that self-initiated activities and voluntary participation rather than out-of-class learning can help foster autonomy through the cultivation of a sense of ownership and self-efficacy. In addition to that, he has suggested that personal responsibility, firm authority control,

authentic communicative opportunities, and motivation can accelerate learner autonomy in a mostly non-English speaking environment.

The researcher has decided to administer a questionnaire to find out the willingness of teachers and teachers-to-be to allow their learners direct and indirect choices to become autonomous learners and applied SPSS Package to analyze the collected data.

III.METHODOLOGY

The survey was conducted employing online Google form in January 2019 and it is limited to the respondents working in various institutions through convenient sampling technique. The sampling comprises Professors, Associate professors and Assistant Professors of English, teachers of English and research scholars of English from Colleges of Engineering and Technology, Arts and Science colleges, Polytechnic colleges and schools across the state, Tamil Nadu.

Sample for Study:

The total respondents for the study were 42. The demographic details of the respondents were collected using the questionnaire. After the pilot study with 4 respondents, necessary modifications were carried out before keeping the finalized questionnaire ready for the intended study.

Cronbach's Alpha in table (1.1), a measure of internal consistency of questionnaire items, shows the presence of internal consistency of the items in the questionnaire with its overall score of 0.752. Bohrnstedt and Knoke (1994) express that researchers should make certain the results of Alpha to be 0.70 or higher.

Table 1 shows Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.752	16

A cross-tabulation analysis enables the researcher to find the frequency distributions of one variable across the categories of another variable to

compare the groups. 16 items were included in the questionnaire to find out the willingness of teachers and To-be –Teachers for granting autonomy to language learners. The comparison between the frequency distribution of two variables shows the existence or non-existence of the relationship between them.

The table 1.2 displays the results obtained in Cronbach's Alpha test and thus, the test results establish the degree of homogeneity of instrument items and underlying constructs. Hence, they highlight the reliability of the scales employed in the study.

Table 2 -Item-Total Statistics

Items	Scale Mean if Item Deleted	Scale Variance if Item Deleted	Corrected Item-Total Correlation	Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted
1.	61.5952	34.686	-.002	.769
2.	61.5476	32.059	.295	.744
3.	61.1667	31.801	.404	.736
4.	61.7857	32.660	.157	.760
5.	61.3571	30.479	.511	.725
6.	61.7619	31.113	.298	.745
7.	61.2857	31.770	.353	.739
8.	61.1190	31.083	.470	.730
9.	61.1667	30.484	.593	.721
10.	61.3810	30.046	.547	.722
11.	61.3810	30.046	.547	.722
12.	61.0238	33.292	.198	.751
13.	61.4048	30.930	.444	.731
14.	61.8810	30.498	.401	.734
15.	61.9286	31.873	.219	.754
16.	61.7857	31.441	.287	.746

The Demographic Profile of Respondents

The analysis of data collected on the demographics of the respondents on sex, age, educational

qualification, designation and place of living is presented in the form of frequency distribution.

Sex.

60% of the respondents were female whereas 41% of the respondents were male in the sample taken for the study.

Age.

Three categories of age represent the frequency distribution of age of the respondents. The frequency of the respondents aged below 30 was 45%, but the same for the respondents aged below 40 was 74%. All of them were below the age of 50.

Educational Qualification.

The frequency of the respondents who were Ph.D. holders among them was 38% and the frequencies of the respondents who were M. A and M.Phil holders were 10% and 62% respectively. A majority of them were M.Phil holders since the frequency of respondents holding M.Phil shows the highest.

Place of living.

60% of the respondents were from the cities, but only 10% of them were from the villages. A majority of the respondents who were from the town was 91%.

Nature of Educational Institution.

The respondents from school show the lowest frequency in the study. The students from engineering institutions showed the highest frequency. The frequency of the respondents from Arts and Science College was 36%.

IV.RESULTS

The attitude of teachers and teacher- to- be towards adopting the strategies which grant autonomy for their taking choice in learning to become an autonomous learner, correlation analysis was undertaken for a two-tailed prediction. The distribution was within acceptable limits of normality.

The items in the questionnaire were based on the choice extended to learners for their becoming autonomous learners and the responsibility of learners for their autonomous learning. The items cover the strategies which involve teachers to grant autonomy to learners within the class and the strategies which involve learners themselves for their autonomous learning within or outside the class. Those strategies are about the responsibilities which students must take for their autonomous language learning. Hence, the parameters that were selected for survey were 16 and they were learners' Choice for the class topic(TC) , choice for Learning methods(LM), choice of Starting Discussion(SD), Group Choice(GC), choice of using Digital Devices(DD), choice in Assignment Topic(AT), learners' responsibility for knowing their Learning process (LH), transferring skills learnt in the class in Out of Class Situations(OC), Framing Sentences to improve their communication skills (FS), being aware of Differences in values, interests and needs of learners(DV), learners' indirect choice through teachers' effort to change the teaching strategy in accordance with interests and needs of learners(TI), teacher's readiness for changing the strategy in relation to the needs and interests of learners on the spot(SS), learners' responsibility for Monitoring their own progress(PM), choice for Self-Correction(SC), choice for Peer Correction (PC)and feedback(PF).

Correlation analysis was undertaken for a two-tailed prediction to understand and determine the relationship between parameters chosen.

The Pearson correlation coefficient between the choice in topic(TC) and the choice in learning method(LM) is 0.241, which is not statistically significant ($p< .05$ for a two-tailed test), based on 42 observations. These two variables tend to increase together. The strength of the association is less than moderate.

From the respondents' choice of option shows the topic choice (TC) has no strong relationship with the out-of-class use of their language(OC). Its association with ability to frame sentences (FS), the need for teaching methods to be based on the interests and needs of learners (TI), the knowledge about the differences in values and interests of learners for other purposes also (DV), the choice for self-correction(SC), peer-correction(PC) as well as peer feedback(PF) shows a weak relation.

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The descriptive characteristics are shown in Table 1.3.

Table 3 Descriptive Statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Topic_choice	42	2.00	5.00	3.9762	.78050
Learning_Strategy	42	2.00	5.00	4.0238	.78050
Starting_Discussion	42	3.00	5.00	4.4048	.66478
Group_Choice	42	1.00	5.00	3.7857	.95088
Digital_Devices	42	3.00	5.00	4.2143	.75015
Assignment_Topic	42	2.00	5.00	3.8095	.96873
Learning_how	42	3.00	5.00	4.2857	.74197
Out_of_Class	42	2.00	5.00	4.4524	.70546
Framing_Sentences	42	3.00	5.00	4.4048	.66478
Differences_in_Values	42	2.00	5.00	4.1905	.77264
Teaching_interests	42	2.00	5.00	4.1905	.77264
Strategy_Spot	42	3.00	5.00	4.5476	.67000
Progress_Monitoring	42	2.00	5.00	4.1667	.76243
Self_Correction	42	2.00	5.00	3.6905	.89683
Peer_Correction	42	1.00	5.00	3.6429	.98331
Peer_Feedback	42	1.00	5.00	3.7857	.92488

Table 4 -Correlation

Correlations

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

The choice given to learners for topic in the class (TC), increases with the on-the-spot need for teachers to adopt the right teaching strategy in relation to the interests and needs of learners(SS).

The Pearson correlation coefficient for the choice in topic(TC) and the willingness of teachers to change teaching method based on the interests and needs of learners on the spot (SS)is 0.399, which is statistically significant (p< .05 for a two-tailed test), based on 42 observations. These two variables tend to increase together. The association has a little more than medium effect.

When teachers allow their learners to start a discussion (SD)in the class, the choice which is given to them may keep them ready for choosing the right learning strategy (LM). The Pearson correlation coefficient value for these items is 0.310 and this shows the medium effect of correlation between them. The Pearson Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level for a two-tailed predication as the p-value is 0.045.

The choice which is granted to learners in the class for the learning strategy tends to increase with their ability to frame sentences on their own or vice versa. The correlation coefficient between them is 0.404 and it is statistically significant as well since its p-value is 0.007.

The choice given in the learning method tends to increase with the responsibility in starting the discussion for learners in the class on their own. The correlation coefficient between them, which is 0.310, shows the moderate impact of both the choices on each other. Its p-value 0.045 confirms the statistical significance of the correlation established between the choice and responsibility of learners.

When teachers allow learners to start the discussion(SD) in the class, they may be ready to choose the learning method (LM)which is suitable to their interests and needs. The practice gives them an opportunity to rely on themselves. However, this chance of allowing learners to initiate the discussion may fail to make any assurance of their becoming pro-active in learning, but the moderate effect of association shows the attitude of teachers towards

granting autonomy to the learners in a positive manner and gives a ray of hope for the teachers to make them autonomous learners.

The correlation coefficient between the choice given in the learning method (LM) and their responsibility to learn how to apply the grammar rules learnt in the class to write on their own(FS) shows the impact of each on the other and Pearson coefficient value for them is 0.404 and p-value 0.007 for it shows the statistical significance of correlation.

The choice in learning methods (LM) and the monitoring of their own progress (PM)in language learning and receiving peer feedback(PF) on the learners' output shows a rather negative correlation.

The choice to start the discussion (SD) in the class for learners increases with learners' using digital devices (DD)of their choice in the class. The table reveals that the value of the coefficient of correlation between them is 0.555. It represents a significant relationship between two variables. The resulting coefficient of correlation is at 0 .05 level of significance.

This value confirms the existence of a significant relationship between the choice for learners to start the discussion in the class for learners and the choice of learners' using the digital devices in the class. It seems fair to interpret that the choice for learners to start the discussion in the class for learners and the choice of learners' using digital devices in the class are related to each other.

The ability to choose the discussion topic(SD) and carry it on by themselves till they arrive at a consensus enables them to choose the right topic for their assignment(AT).

From the table of Pearson correlation analysis, the choice granted to learners for starting the discussion in the class on their own for the chosen class topic enables them to become autonomous in their learning. Learners attain the readiness for discussion, once they develop metacognition in them. The knowledge about how they learn a language helps them to frame sentences on their own, apply the language learnt in a different

context outside the class. A strong bond exists between the knowledge about their own learning process and style and their ability to transfer the skill in different context.

The increase in the choice provided to start the discussion (SD)on their own shows no corresponding increase in the choice of groups(GC), preference for peer correction(PC) and peer feedback (PF).

The choice for being a member of a group within the class(GC) to learn language is inversely related to the choice in learning methods(LM), the inclination to make use of the opportunity given to start the discussion(SD), the responsibility of learners to be aware of the acquisition process(LH) and to transfer the skills learnt in the class to the life in out-of-the class context(OC), to keep track of the progress in language learning (PM)and learners' preference for self-correction(PM) as well.

The choice extended to learners to use digital devices (DD)in the class if they are willing tends to increase with the choice given to them for assignment topic(AT). The coefficient of correlation between these variables shows the strong effect of correlation existing between both.

The use of digital devices(DD) in the class gives learners opportunities for developing their skills in writing by applying the grammatical rules learnt in the class(FS), transferring the skills (OC)developed within the class, for their readiness for choosing the topic of interest and need for the assignment(AT), their awareness about the differences in values, needs and interests of co-learners(DV), monitoring their own progress (PM)and understanding the necessity for keeping teacher's choice of teaching method based on their needs and interests(TI).

The opportunity to use digital devices(DD) in the class by the learners has no direct relationship with the peer correction (PC)as the same relationship occurs between the choice in the assignment topic(AT)and their responsibility to monitor their learning progress (PM).

The need for the adoption of suitable teaching method (TI)shows the lowest correlation coefficient value of 0.014 with the choice offered to learners for the assignment topic (AT)and this value reveals the least effect of correlation. If the teaching method suits the interests and needs of learners, it can offset the need for a difference in the assignment topic. The selection of a topic by the teacher will suffice for learners to enjoy the work.

As the choice for peer feedback (PF)increases, the choice for assignment topic (AT)decreases and the need for changing the teaching strategy (SS)in relation to the needs and interests of learners on the spot also decreases.

The adoption of suitable teaching method (TI)in relation to the interests and needs of learners on the part of teachers has a relatively high correlation with the responsibility of learners to attempt to transfer the skills learnt in the class to the real-time events/contexts(OC). The Pearson correlation coefficient for the choice in teaching method and the responsibility of learners possessing out -of- class transferring skills is 0.509 which is statistically significant with the value of p to be 0.001.

The learners' knowledge about their own learning process (LH)correlates positively with the teaching method based on the interests and needs of learners (TI)and the choice of using digital devices in the class(DD).

The knowledge about one's own learning process of learners as well as style(LH), has an inverse relationship with the choice in groups(GC), choice of peer correction(PC) and peer feedback(PF).

The responsibility of learners to develop their skills to apply the grammatical rules(FS) to write on their own correlates positively with their responsibility for transferring the skills in out-of-the class context (OC). The correlation coefficient is 0.588.

The choice on the part of teachers to adopt a teaching method to suit the interests and need (TI)of learners shows the highest positive relation with the awareness of learners towards the differences among learners in a group or class in terms of values,

interests and needs(DV) remarkably. The correlation coefficient is 1.00.

The knowledge about the differences among them in the class in terms of values, needs and interests (DV)has a negative correlation with the responsibility of students in monitoring the progress in their language learning(PM).

Learners who choose peer correction(PC) may develop the habit of monitoring their progress(PM) and the correlation coefficient between them is 0.342.

Learners who opt for self-correction (SC)are ready for monitoring their learning progress(PM). The existence of a positive correlation between them with the value of 0.398 favours the autonomy to be granted to learners. Those learners can opt for peer feedback (PF)also. Again the analysis of the data shows a positive correlation between self-correction and peer feedback.

The choice offered to utilize peer correction(PC)for the learning output of learners has a relatively strong correlation with the choice for peer feedback(PF). The correlation coefficient is 0.745. It is the second highest correlation coefficient among the parameters set for the study.

V.DISCUSSION

The findings establish the correlation existing positively for many parameters and though negatively for some parameters but its weak negative association.

Allowing learners to utilize the Wi-Fi within the class kindles their curiosity to learn more. Their knowledge about various learning methods augments the opportunity for being autonomous learners. The learning needs, interests and style differ from a learner to another. Digital devices whet almost the majority of them at a time. A plethora of devices helps them to learn how to apply the grammatical rules and other language concepts learnt in the class for outside –the- class use. Their exposure to plenty of topics under the sun available makes them choose the topic of their interest which is relevant to their field. Their readiness to allow

their peer group or their involvement in self-correction in the class to evaluate their learning output is possible with the cross-check they can make with the readily available answers online in the class. If the knowledge level of the peer group is more than their own, the assessment as well as the corrective feedback of co-students will be highly beneficial. The affective filter will be low relatively. Awareness of the language acquisition process prepares them for the real-time use.

The awareness of the differences in terms of values, interests and needs of learners in their group or class enables them to choose the assignment topic relevant to their group or class. This awareness keeps them track of the differences in learning style and processes among them and motivated to transfer the learnt skills in different contexts assuredly. It makes them decide to choose self-correction. The Pearson correlation coefficient shows the impact of one item on the other strongly.

The indirect choice extended to learners as the effort of teachers to adopt an appropriate teaching method based on the interests and needs of learners helps learners to avail themselves of the choice for using digital devices within the class, to select the assignment topic which will satisfy their needs and interests, to be aware of their learning processes, transfer the skills developed in a meaningful way outside the classroom and to auto correct their own language output.

The responsibility of learners to monitor their own progress in language learning propels them to engage in class activity in a proactive manner. It makes them initiate any class discussion as well. They could realize the benefit of proper use of digital devices within the class and show interest in developing the communication skills in the chosen language and transferring skills in the contexts other than class. These learners wish either to autocorrect or to choose peer correction their language output. The correlation coefficient shows the direct relationship between them.

The knowledge about one's own learning processes keeps them ready for improving their communication skills and transferring the learnt skills outside- the- class context. It makes them understand the existing differences among the learners in terms of values and interests and utilize the indirect choice extended through teachers' willingness to adopt a learning method suiting to the needs and interests of learners.

The ability of learners' to transfer the skills developed within the class makes them ready for initiating the class discussion, utilizing digital devices within class in a proper way, comprehending their own learning processes and styles, improving their writing skills the differences in values, interests and needs among the learners in the class, monitoring their own language learning and availing themselves of the indirect choice given to them through teachers' adoption of suitable teaching method for facilitating their language learning.

VI.CONCLUSION

The study points out the opportunity for learners to rely on themselves to develop or enhance the skills or knowledge about a topic to a certain extent, provided teachers give them plenty of choice in learning methods, using Digital devices, assignment topic or the topic for the class discussion and learners take responsibility for their language learning by checking their progress in a planned manner, being aware of their own learning processes, the existing differences among the learners in terms of the values, interests and needs ,attempting to autocorrect or prefer peer correction for their learning output, their readiness for peer feedback and their readiness for transferring skills learnt in the class in the day-to-day life.

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