



Learner Autonomy in Language Learning

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Research Title

Learner Autonomy ... How Can it be Aspired by Arab Learners?

A Study of the Possibility of Empowering the UAE Learners to Be Autonomous in Their ESL Learning.

What Learner autonomy is not

- Learner autonomy is not the same as self-instruction or learning without a teacher because the former is a referent of cognitive ability whereas the latter is mostly a resemblance of physical isolation that does not necessarily enhance autonomy.

'There is very little evidence that self-instructional modes of learning are in themselves sufficient to lead to greater autonomy or independence (Benson and Voller, 1997: 9).'

What Learner autonomy is not

- Learner autonomy is not the synonym of ‘unbridled learning’ (Thanasoulas, 2000: 10); it rather flourishes by intrapersonal initiation, interpersonal collaboration, and learner-centred instruction.

'Autonomy includes the notion of interdependence that is being responsible for one's own conduct in the social context: being able to cooperate with others and solve conflicts in constructive ways (Kohonen, 1992: 19).'

What Learner autonomy is not

- Autonomy is not only confined to learning in self-access centres, it can be promoted in the classroom through task-based and learner-centred activities.

'Autonomy is not presented as a radical alternative to classroom-based learning; it is to do with ensuring quality of learning by putting the control over learning in the place where the learning is occurring: the learner's mind (Crabbe, 1993: 444).'

What Learner autonomy is

Learner autonomy is:

- ‘a capacity for detachment, critical reflection, decision-making, and independent action’ (Little, 1999: 4).
- ‘the situation in which the learner is totally responsible for all the decisions concerned with his learning and the implementation of those decisions’ (Dickinson, 1991: 11).

What is Learner autonomy in the Arab Context?

- In the Arab context:

Autonomy is a personality trait and an organisational capacity assumed to promote the learners' initiative to benefit from the facilitating supportive context to manage their language learning independently.

Relevance of the definition to the Arab Setting

- Learner autonomy is not a language skill, but an inspiration assumed to enhance ESL skills.
- Learner autonomy has a pragmatic function in helping students meet their linguistic needs and external goals.
- Learner autonomy does not occur in vacuum; it entails creating learning opportunities where it can be practised.

Relevance of the definition to the Arab Setting

- Learner autonomy entails raising students' awareness of the different learning strategies and how to use them.
- Learner autonomy should be legitimised and adopted as an educational goal supported by all participants.
- Learner autonomy is not an abdication of the teacher's role. It is a reciprocal process that involves both 'letting go' and 'taking hold' (Dam, 1998: 78).

What does it mean to be autonomous?

Autonomous learners have basic characteristics some of which are:

- **Curiosity:** Being curious means being in constant search for knowledge any where and in any form. Asking questions can be an easy way of assimilation.
- **Criticality:** Being critical means thinking of what to be learnt matching it with the existing knowledge to create an organisation of thoughts and equilibration between the old concepts and new experiences.

What does it mean to be autonomous?

- **Collaboration:** Being collaborative means interacting with others for reinforcing understanding and getting a taken-as-shared knowledge (Cobb, 1991).
- **Awareness:** An autonomous learner should be aware that the classroom does not have the ‘whole knowledge’. It only provides a small proportion of linguistic input whereas the others reside somewhere he has to ‘Pin and Pick’.

Why Learner Autonomy?

- Learner autonomy is underpinned by a constructivist epistemology which posits that personal knowledge is the outcome of the individual's initiative and own interpretation of the external reality.
- Learner autonomy is promoted through the student's agency who should dive deep to collect the pearls of knowledge out of the spread oysters.

Why Learner Autonomy?

- Knowledge is a personal ownership and students should be free to choose the effective resources for collecting it and the appropriate strategies for keeping it.
- Knowledge is viable and evolving as an individual often adapts, develops and probably modifies it every time he gets into new learning experiences through the two processes of assimilation and accommodation proposed by Piaget (1979).

Why Learner Autonomy in the UAE Context?

- **Breadth & Scope:** The non-Arab speakers in the UAE represent about 65% who mostly use English in their communication. Hence, there is an encouraging environment for language practice.
- **Diversity of Resources:** The UAE is a wealthy country; therefore, there is variability in both digital and paper-based resources for language users to benefit from.

Why Learner Autonomy in the UAE Context?

- **University Requirements:** Maintaining an English language competence and passing any of the proficiency tests has become one of the basic credentials for joining a university in the UAE.
- **Employment Requirement:** Since almost 80% of the public and private sectors are heading to be bilingual institutions, people are trying to improve their English by all means, one of which is to be autonomous.

Research Questions

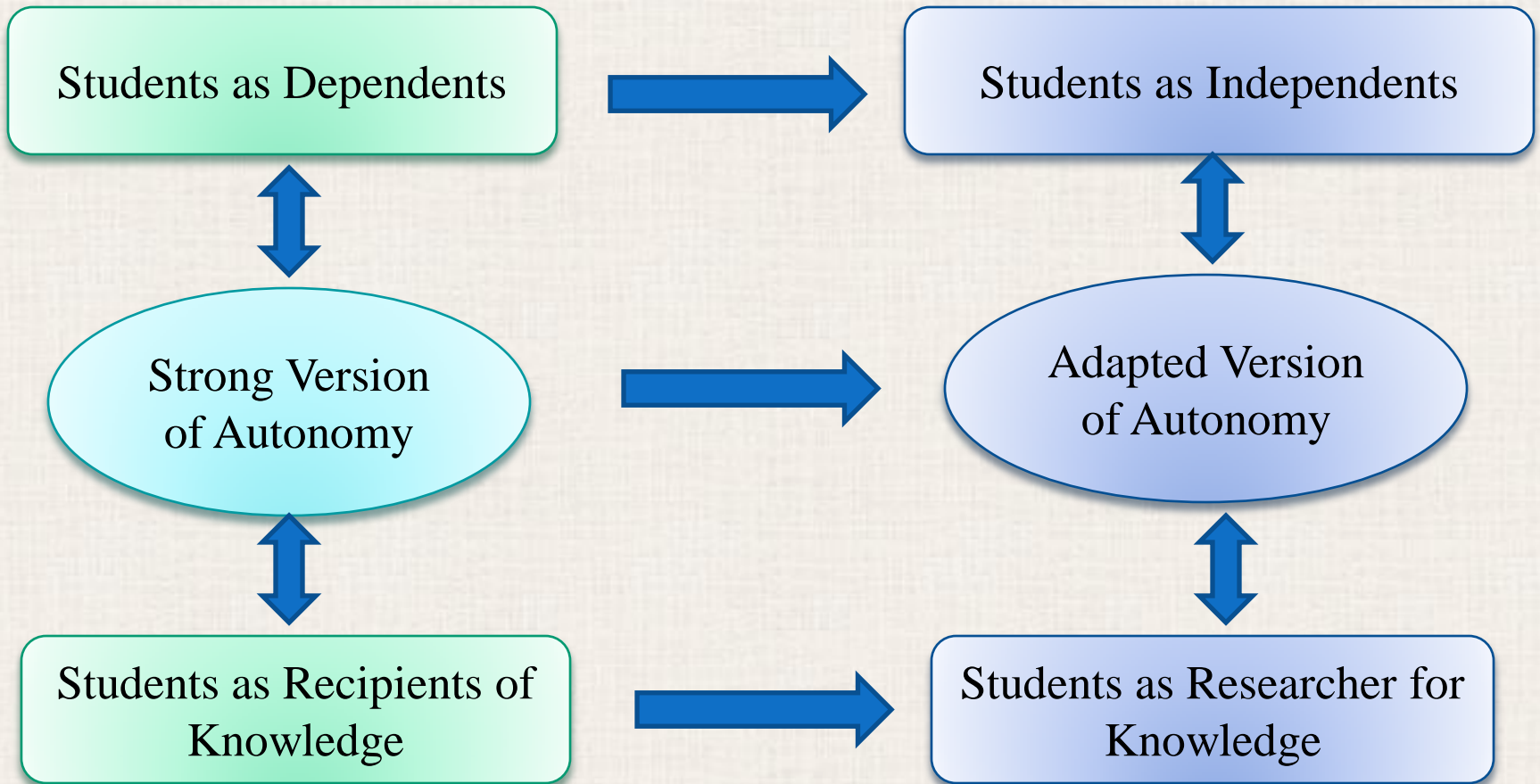
- What hinders the adoption of learner autonomy in English language learning in the UAE?
- What version of learner autonomy is more convenient for the UAE context?
- What are the roles of both students and ESL teachers in promoting their autonomy?

Research Aims

- The poured outcomes will provide ample information about how the educational system works.
- It will explain the degree of consistency between teaching and assessment techniques.
- It will provide a visualisation of how to empower the UAE students to be autonomous in ESL learning.
- It helps understand how to help students become researchers rather than receivers of knowledge.

Research Aims

Figure (1) Research Aims



Research Methodology

This study applies the mixed-methods Methodology (3M) where a number of quantitative and qualitative methods are used to benefit from both worlds. This (3M):

- **First** provides breadth in terms of investigating the opinions of a large number of participants; thus having a more common and generalisable research findings.
- **Second** provides depth in terms of understanding the process of project and explaining research findings.

Research Methods

- **High-achievers' Focus Group:** It will yield abundant information about the non-systematic techniques adopted by such brilliant students to improve their English.
- **Low-achievers' Focus Group:** It will reflect the reasons underlying the poor English competence from the weak students themselves.

Research Methods

- **Students' Questionnaire:** This will provide enough data about the attitudes of both male and female students about their learning perceptions, habits, and conventions.
- **Students' Interviews:** They will help have direct answers to some pre-set questions that require rather detailed answers.

Research Methods

- **Teachers' Interviews:** They may explain students' dependence and how their assessment techniques are compatible with the way they teach English.
- **School Principals' Interviews:** They will answer questions related to the working system and the degree to which it can be adaptable and flexible to any innovation.

Research Participants

NO	Type of Method	No. Of Participants	Age
1	H. A. Focus group	(6)	18+
2	L. A. Focus Group	(6)	18+
3	Ss. Questionnaire	(100-120)	18+
4	Ss. Interviews	(8-10)	18+
5	Ts. Interviews	(5-7)	Different Ages
6	Hs. Interviews	(2-4)	

Data Analysis

- The questionnaire findings will be analysed in a normal statistical manner to identify the commonality of certain learning traits.
- The research outcomes poured by the other qualitative instruments will be analysed in an interpretive hermeneutic way to identify why students think and behave in a certain way towards ESL learning.

The Fuel of Learner Autonomy in the UAE

- **Fertility of the Context:** The non-Arab population in the UAE is 65% and they mostly use English in their communication. Hence, there is an encouraging environment for language practice.
- **Diversity of Resources:** The UAE is a wealthy country; therefore, there is diversity of English learning resources in both digital and paper-based forms for students to benefit from.

The Fuel of Learner Autonomy in the UAE

- **University Requirements:** This represents an external stimuli that drives students to improve their English and learner autonomy is presumed key to achieve this.
- **Employment Requirement:** Since almost 80% of the public and private sectors are heading to be bilingual institutions, people need to learn English for general, academic, and specific purposes where self-directed learning forms its basic element.



Thank You For Listening.

Any Kind Advice?