Autonomous Learning Case Study in General English 1 Classes at UFM and Suggestions

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Abstract: *In Industrial Revolution 4.0, Learning Autonomy was a key component in lifelong learning process. Self-directed learners can set their own learning objectives, select their own learning content and methods, monitor, and assess their own process. However, to be truly independent in language learning, learners must be aware of their lifetime efforts while also receiving proper teacher guidance and support. This paper aims to introduce Learning Autonomy and its remarkable features. 116 freshmen in Non - English Language Major in General English 1 Classes at the University of Finance and Marketing took part in a survey to determine their level of learning autonomy, particularly in the subject. The questionnaire responses indicate that students' learning attitudes, responsibility, and motivation for autonomy in learning the subject are quite low. As a result, freshmen should be trained to take a more active role in learning process planning, goal setting, and negotiating the teaching and learning process. Then there are some suggestions for both the lecturers and the learners to effectively promote autonomous learning.*

Keywords: *Learning attitude, learner autonomy, motivation, responsibility, suggestions*

1. Introduction

Improving the capacity for autonomy in learning is an urgent issue with long-term significance in both favorable and challenging directions, especially in the context of daily changes in society and the explosion of Industry 4.0. Within the scope of this paper, the author provides definitions of Learning Autonomy (LA) from various researchers to provide an overview of the approach and its benefits to learners. Then, the writer examines the LA literature used in the General English 1 (GE1) subject she oversees with a questionnaire reflecting the students' frequency of participation in the activities, emphasizing learners' active roles in the process of acquiring knowledge. The results are analyzed and interpreted. Finally, at the end of the paper, recommendations for LA in GE Classes will be mentioned.

2. Content

2.1. Literature review

2.1.1. Learner Autonomy

According to Henri Holec (1975), "Learner Autonomy" is "the ability to take charge of one's own learning". Sharing the same point of view, Dickinson (1993) agrees that LA is the capability to form all decisions associated with students' learning and implementation of these decisions in an environment that "learning without the direct control of a teacher". It differs from the traditional teacher-led approach within which most decisions are made by teachers. Autonomous learning is claimed to create more personal and focused learning. Therefore, to achieve better results, training must be based on the needs and preferences of learners. In other words, the topic matter should be determined by students. Learners in autonomous environment are "free to choose aims and purposes, setting goals, as well as choosing materials, methods, and tasks" (Dam, 1995).

Through the above concepts, there are similarities between the learner-centered approach and the LA. Learner centered approach (LCA) is an approach based on the idea that learners can learn better when they are aware of their own goals (Nunan, 1988). LA is considered as "the product of an interactive process in which the teacher gradually enlarges the scope of her learners' autonomy by gradually allowing them more control of the process and content of their learning (Little, 2007). This highly affects learners' active participation in understanding and connecting with knowledge. "Learner –centered practice generates autonomy in the language classroom" (Benson, 2010)

Bottom of Form **2.1.2. Benefits of Autonomous Learning**

Great benefits that autonomous learning brings to learners can be summarized as follows:

First, students are extremely proactive in the autonomous learning environment. Students

themselves are aware of how, when and what is being communicated while learning.

Second, independent learners hold better performance as learning is more personal and focused, acquiring the needed knowledge by their own roles.

Third, autonomous learners are well-equipped with vital skills, such as skills of identifying and setting learning goals, understanding learning strategies, and having clear motivation to learn.

2.2. Methods

The methodology used in this research is a qualitative method. A questionnaire was completed at the end of the GE 1 course by 116 non-English language major freshmen. There are 4 main parts in the questionnaire, including Participants' General Information on English Competency, Learners' Dependence on Teachers in the Teaching and Learning process, Learners' elf-directed Learning Ability, and Learners' Autonomous Learning Plan.

2.3. Results and discussion

2.3.1. Participants' General Information on English Competency

The first section is about participants' general information, including their English competency in high school and their awareness on the nature and importance of LA.

Students are asked to rate their own English ability with 4 options of Excellent, Good, Average, and Below Average in the first question. 66 students answered that their English ability was Average, 44 students had Good ability, 5 students found themselves weak with English skills and only 1 student thought that his/her English competence was Excellent. In the student's assessment of their English subject's average scores in high school in question 2, there were 21 students got 9-10, 81 students got 7-8, 13 students got 5-6 and only 1 student got under 5.

The percentage of answers in question 3 correctly indicated that students' self-directed learning still necessitates supervision or guidance. Specifically, just over half of them (56%) agreed that independent learning meant studying under the supervision of a teacher; the remaining 43.2% stated that autonomous learners worked independently. In response to question 4, 101 students (87.1 %) stated that working in pairs or groups was an effective method for autonomous learning, while 12.9 % believed that learners would study or work alone in autonomous learning.

The last question focused on students' perceptions of the significance of LA. The findings revealed that 63 students selected "Very Important" and 45 chose "Important." The other 8 students agreed that this was "Normal." There was no choice for "Relatively Important" and "Not Important at all".

2.3.2. Learners' Dependence on Teachers in the Teaching and Learning Process

Questions:

I want the lecturer to explain everything without asking questions to test my critical thinking.

I want the lecturer to impart knowledge to me and I listen to the lecturer's presentation.

I want the lecturer to give me regular feedback on my work and tell me how to improve things.

I want the lecturer to give the opportunity that all the activities can be completed together with the lecturer in the classroom and thus no homework is set.

I want lecturer/ classmate to self-assess my work without asking me to give any comment.

This is a five-point scale response section, intending to focus on the factors that demonstrate the Learner's Reliance on the Lecturer.

There were 20 choices for "Agree" and "Strongly Agree" with all learning activities organized and managed by the lecturer, such as giving the students activities to work on, imparting knowledge to the students, taking control of their students' learning, giving the students regular feedback, and so on. 55 students (47.4%) rated "Neutral." These students are still very acquainted with traditional teaching methods in which the teacher is the person who decides all learning and teaching activities. Furthermore, there were 34 (29.3%) "Disagree" votes and 7 "Strongly Disagree" votes, indicating that all learning and teaching activities in the classroom should not be fully controlled by the teacher.

In short, the results show that, more than half of surveyed students in GE1 classes continue to regard the lecturer as the center of knowledge and in charge of the students' learning, acting as the primary information giver and evaluator. Students are typically passive recipients of information.

2.3.3. Learners' Self-directed Learning Ability

Questions:

I set learning goals inside and outside of the classroom.

I suggest class activities or assignments.

I choose study materials for class assignments.

I evaluate their own learning or classmates' learning, and their courses.

I identify strengths/ weaknesses in my learning

process.

For this section, the answers range from Never, Rarely, Occasionally, Usually, and Always.

According to the research findings in this section, only 30/116 students they "Usually" and "Always" do activities to demonstrate their independent learning ability, while up to 12 students said "Never" and 34 students admitted "Rarely" took actions such as setting clear goals for themselves, shaping their learning process in line with goals and plans, monitoring their own learning process, and evaluating the outcome. The remaining 40/116 students "Occasionally" participate in these activities.

From the numbers, many students in the survey did not really take active roles in identifying their own learning needs, determining their learning goals, defining the sources they require to learn, to use appropriate learning strategies, and to evaluate learning outcomes with or without assistance from an outsider (Knowles, 1975).

2.3.4. Learners' Autonomous Learning Plan

Questions:

I learn more from English-related materials.

I look for opportunities to practice communicating in English face-to-face/ online through social media with foreigners, friends, and relatives.

I watch English TV programs/ movies.

I actively participate in English courses and extracurricular activities such as English-Speaking clubs.

I do my own exercises, self-review knowledge even when the teacher does not ask.

The questionnaire's final section is about learners' plans to learn independently outside of class. The answers follow the same scale as in Section 3.

Only 8/116 students have an active learning plan, such as doing their own exercises and self-reviewing knowledge even when the lecturer does not request it. They actively participate in lessons, participate in extracurricular activities such as English-speaking clubs, exchange English-related activities with a group of friends who are always looking for opportunities to practice English, and so on. There are 12 students who "Rarely" or "Never" have active learning plans. Furthermore, 61 and 35 students, respectively, "Sometimes" and "Usually" have such plans. In general, students' sense of active planning in their learning is still low; the number of students who chose "Sometimes" indicates that their implementation of the active plan in learning is not consistent.

Conclusion and suggestions

Promoting autonomy in foreign language learning necessitates synchronous implementation from a variety of perspectives, but all of them influence learners to be proactive, self-disciplined, and accountable to achieve their goals. To promote LA, it is necessary to raise awareness and effect positive change in both teachers and students. Simultaneously, investment in training sessions for both lecturers and students is required. This is the combination of many factors, including:

- Update of vital skills from both teachers and learners, including the skills of cooperation, technology, learning and personal characteristics.

- Adjustment of teachers' traditional professional roles to Facilitators, Counselors, - Resources, Managers, and Organizers.

- Renovation of class activity organization, such as taking full advantage of Individual/ Group Project, Purposeful individualized homework, and Student Self & Peer assessment.

- Modification of teaching procedure and classroom model by effectively applying 1-2-3 teaching procedure and Flipped classroom.

- Selecting interactive contexts and subjects to prioritize students' interests.

- Revision from school administrators on curriculum and evaluation methods.

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