

The Role of Teachers in Fostering Learners' Autonomy in Classrooms: A study of KPK Universities

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Abstract

The aim of the present study is to discover the role played by a teacher in fostering learners' autonomy. The problem was explored by teachers' questionnaire and observations of the classrooms of those teachers who participated in the study. The investigation was directed with 54 teachers of the departments of English Abdul Wali Khan University Mardan, Hazara University Mansehra, Abbotabad University of Science and Technology and Bacha Khan University Charsadda. The nature of the data collected was both qualitative and quantitative. The purpose of the present study was to find out the role played by a teacher in developing and promoting learners' autonomy. The analysis of the questionnaires revealed that the teachers have a positive attitude towards promoting learners' autonomy and they trusted that understudies ought to be associated with choices making process. However, during observations of the classrooms, it was found out by the researcher that in some classes students were not given the opportunity to make decisions regarding learning. In some classes, it was completely learner-centered approach being applied while in some classes it was teacher-centered. In conclusion, although all the teachers agreed that learners' autonomy should be fostered in classrooms. The teachers tried to promote learners autonomy in the classroom but they still needed a lot to work on it.

Key Words: *ELT, SPSS, Classroom Observation, Teachers' Autonomy, KP Universities.*

Introduction

The word autonomy is originally taken from the area of politics and moral philosophy. Self-rule is a befuddling term on the grounds that generally it is characterized as self-guideline and free learning. Autonomy is very important in education because if the students are autonomous they will be able to acquire knowledge and show enthusiasm about learning Likewise teachers also play vital role in learners autonomy because if the

teacher by himself or herself is unaware of autonomy and if he is not autonomous how is he supposed to promote learners autonomy. Teacher Awareness is an important aspect in learners' autonomy. With the help of this ability teacher will be able to check what is going on in the classroom and what will happen next. Teachers awareness play vital role in productive and also positive learning environment. The idea from which learners' autonomy has been established is

that if the learner are allowed to make a decision regarding their learning, they become more active and enthusiastic and gives more attention to learning because they are given the opportunity to participate in class discussions. Therefore if a teacher wants to make the learner autonomous, he or she needs to involve the student in classroom decisions regarding learning. A teacher plays very much important role in this process because autonomous learning of a learner is dependent on a teacher. The teacher is responsible to create such kind of environment in the classroom where autonomy of the learner should be accepted.

If we expect from a teacher to promote learners autonomy but the teacher by himself or herself did not experience any teachers training in which the analytical approach is key element for teaching and learning, then it is impractical and unworkable. If a teacher is autonomous he or she not only knows what and how to do but also why to do? An autonomous teacher has a firm system of judgments which are theoretical as well as practical. If a teacher is autonomous he or she should not only know what to do but also why to do. He or she has a solid network of convictions that are both practical and theoretical. If a teacher is autonomous he or she will must think about how the students are thinking and at the same time she will also know how to create a constructive culture for children. They do not accept the curriculum that is given to them rather they think critically about the suggested curriculum whether they agree with it or not. They take responsibility for the education they are offering children.

Literature Review

Teacher autonomy maybe defined as the ability of a teacher to develop proper skills, attitude and knowledge for oneself as a teacher (Smith, 2001).

Misunderstanding of Teacher's Role in Learner's Autonomy

The very first misinterpretation of teachers' role in learners' autonomy is that the teacher is not important in the process of autonomous learning. The teacher plays a vital role in this process and the responsibility of a teacher cannot be ignored. It is true that learners autonomy is based on active attitude towards learning and their independence but without the supervision of a teacher this whole process will fall into disorder or results in low efficiency.

Second misconception was pointed out by little. According to him autonomy means self-instruction. These both are often regarded as synonyms to each other. However these are not synonyms to each other. Self-instruction is that situation in which the learner is not dependent on the teacher but the learner works alone (Dickson 1987, p.5, cited in Jones 2003). Shortly, self-instruction is that project which is initiated, scheduled and executed by the learner alone and without the involvement of a teacher (Benson 2001, p.131, cited in Jones 2003). Self-instruction mainly focuses on the learning that it is carried out by the learner alone or not.

Oppositely, learners' autonomy mainly focuses on if the learner controls the learning or not. The learner takes his own responsibility instead of a teacher in learning, for selecting material, assessment, learning activities and goal settings (Benson, 2001).

Barfield (2001) stated that students' autonomy is completely dependent upon the classroom environment created by teacher whether it accepts autonomy or not.

Kohlberg (1987,) gave a description of ideal opinions. These teachers not only know about students or learners thinking but also know how they can promote such kind of culture in the classroom which is completely useful and encouraging for the students. According to Kohlberg (1987) autonomous teachers never blindly follow the curriculum that is provided to them by the curriculum specialists. They take responsibility to adapt that curriculum for the students which is according to the needs of the learners.

Moreover, Al Ansari(2013) highlighted the importance of role of the teacher in fostering learners autonomy by saying that teachers play vital role in fostering learners autonomy. A teacher creates such environment in the class room which is helpful to this approach. Firstly an autonomous teacher understands how the students used to learn earlier and then increasingly promotes learners independence.

Thavenius (1999) suggested the definition of autonomous teacher as the one who is independent in making decisions about learning and have the potential to make his or her students autonomous regarding taking decisions about learning (Benson, 2011)

According to Joshi (2011) an autonomous teachers is the one who is a resource person, an organizer and a facilitator who provides feedback and encouragement to the learner and also creates learning atmosphere in the class. Moreover, an autonomous teacher is a guide and works

as cooperative facilitator not as an authoritative instructor.

La Ganza (2008) stated that the ability of a teacher to make the learners autonomous is dependent upon four features. Firstly, the relationship of the teacher with his or her partners and teachers. Secondly, the relationship of teacher with his or her students. Thirdly, the relationship of the teacher with that institution in which he or she is teaching. Lastly, the relationship of the teachers with external institutions and administration of the society.

Reference to promoting teachers autonomy Balcikanli (2009) suggested that teachers autonomy requires successful language teacher education in order to make the teachers more aware of the concealed process of teaching (i.e. the reason why they carry on particular strategies) and to stay informed about new ideas in their field.

According to Higgs (1988) the teacher is just like a manager in the process of learning who help the students to learn independently by creating supporting learning environment. He or she is always available as a resource person who guides the students and challenges them to attain their potential. Teachers also help the students to become aware of the requirements and expectations of institution that are associated with the discipline in which they are studying.

Naun. D (1993) in a book titled as *Taking Control Autonomy in Language Learning* says that modern teachers has changed their roles from just an instructor to a monitor, a participant, a guide and a consultant. They help the students to language and also motivate them to develop more useful and better techniques

for their own learning. They are no more playing traditional role rather they moved to the new one.

Ho.J (1995) said that if a teacher wants a student to become autonomous learner so he or she must should redefine their views regarding learner-teacher role. The teacher should not be considered to take responsibility of the entire burden solely but the learner also has to play vital role in understanding and realizing his responsibilities regarding learning.

Voller.P (1997) suggested that language teacher may also play the role of a supporter and facilitator who start off and assist process of making decisions. A teacher can be a mentor and consultant who give response to the evolving needs of independent. Teacher should be a resource person who is having the ability to make his or her knowledge and also should be an expert person who is always there for his learners when they need.

Yang.N 1998 in his article exploring a new role for teachers promoting learner autonomy says that teacher play important role in developing learner strategies to make the development of learners' autonomy smooth. It means that a teacher should always be responsible for instructions of strategy.

Xu.J (2004) wrote a research paper on A Study on College English Teachers' Role in Developing Learner Autonomy. In this paper he has discussed that a teacher should always be there to help and support the students in building their confidence and belief in becoming an autonomous learner. The teacher should also guide the students in making practical plans. An autonomous teacher should always be there to help the students how to think about new learning strategies and then

how to practice these strategies. In order to facilitate learners' autonomy the teacher should effectively use the self-directed center. Communication should be encouraged between the students and the teacher using different channels so that the learning process can be monitored and more opportunities can be provided to the students to expand their autonomous abilities.

Research Methodology

The present study employs a descriptive approach to explore the role of teachers concerning learner's autonomy in learning. The research is both quantitative and qualitative in natures which employee a descriptive approach to explore teachers' role concerning learner autonomy in learning. In the present study two different sources of data were utilized, teachers' questionnaire and teachers' classrooms observation. In order to find the perception of the teachers the researcher prepared a teachers questionnaire adapted from the questionnaire used in the research paper **Teachers' and Students' Perceptions of Learner Autonomy in the ELT Department at Eastern Mediterranean University** written by **Parmis Farahi** in which different questions were asked from the teachers about their role in learners autonomy. Besides teachers questionnaire the second tool that was used for data collection was observation of the classrooms. The researcher also observed teachers in their classrooms in order to check the validity of their responses. The teachers were observed whether they foster autonomy in their classrooms or not. The researcher went to the classrooms and attended their classes. The primary purpose was to find the nature of autonomy in the class room

in the light of responses given by teachers as participants of the study. Another purpose of the observation was to check the autonomy of learners in their classrooms. For this purpose a checklist was prepared in which different items were included. The checklist was taken to the classrooms during observations and according to that checklist the classes were observed in order to find out the nature of autonomy in that classes and the role of teachers in fostering autonomy.

Population

The population selected for this research was English lecturers public sector universities of Khyber Pakhtun Khwa Pakistan.

Sampling Procedure

Out of all public sector universities only four universities of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa were selected. In these four universities Department of English from each University was selected. The participants in this research were lecturers who were teaching to B.S level. The study consisted of 54 English lecturers from Abdul Wali Khan University Mardan, Bacha Khan University Charsadda, Hazara University Mansehra and Abbotabad University of science and technology. The sampling technique used in this research is cluster sampling. According to cluster sampling the total population is divided into groups

(known as clusters) and a simple random sample of the groups is selected. The elements in each cluster are then sampled.

Variable Measurements

A questionnaire was designed in order to investigate what the teachers think about the role played by teacher in fostering learners' autonomy and what are their suggestions about learners' autonomy in department of English of their universities. After collecting the data through close ended questionnaire from teachers the researcher observed the classes of that teachers to check the validity of their responses and to check whether they are fostering learner autonomy in their classrooms or not.

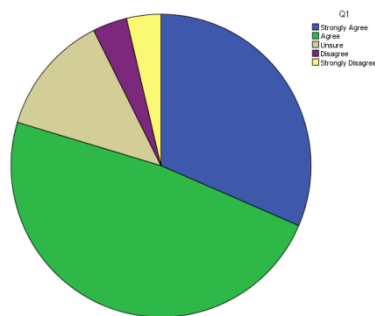
The data that the researcher collected through teachers' questionnaire was checked out in different stages. The present examination utilized both subjective and quantitative information. Quantitative information incorporated the close ended items in teachers' questionnaire, and the reactions were broke down by utilizing the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 18.0. Through distinct measurements, the information was examined and frequencies and percentages were figured. The qualitative information incorporated the perceptions of the classrooms

Data Analysis

Q1. Language learners of all ages can develop learner autonomy.

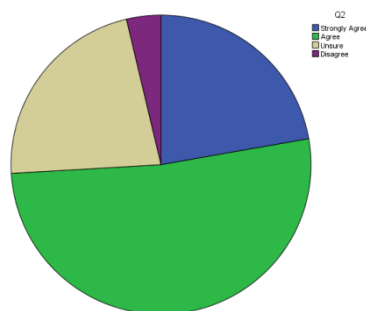
Scales	Frequency	Percent
Strongly Agree	17	31.5
Agree	26	48.1
Unsure	7	13.0
Disagree	2	3.7
Strongly Disagree		3.7

Total	54	100.0
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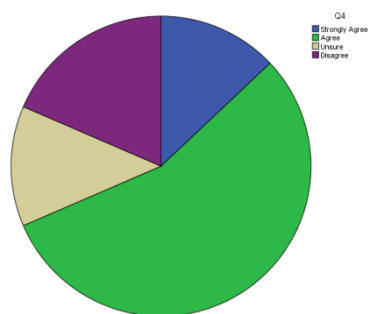
Q2. Learner autonomy is promoted through regular opportunities for learners to complete the task alone

Scales	Frequency	Percent
Strongly-Agree	12	22.2
Agree	28	51.9
Unsure	12	22.2
Disagree	2	3.7
Total	54	100.0



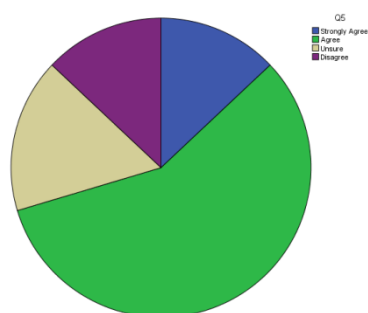
Q3. Individuals who lack autonomy are not likely to be effective language learners.

Scales	Frequency	Percent
Strongly Agree	7	13.0
Agree	30	55.6
Unsure	7	13.0
Disagree	10	18.5
Total	54	100.0



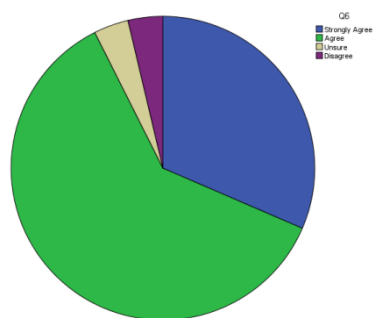
Q4. Autonomy can develop most effectively through learning outside the Classroom

Scales	Frequency	Percent
Strongly Agree	7	13.0
Agree	31	57.4
Unsure	9	16.7
Disagree	7	13.0
Total	54	100.0



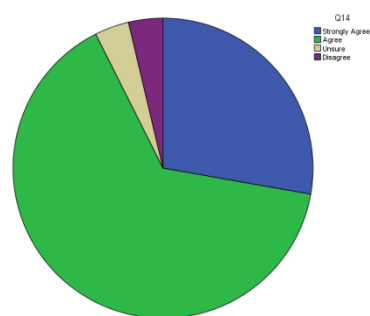
Q5. Involving learner in decisions about what to learn promotes learner autonomy.

Scales	Frequency	Percent
Strongly Agree	17	31.5
Agree	33	61.1
Unsure	2	3.7
Disagree	2	3.7
Total	54	100.0



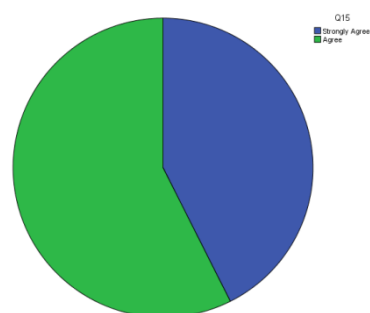
Q7. Motivated language learners are more likely to develop learner autonomy than learners who are not motivated.

Scales	Frequency	Percent
Strongly Agree	15	27.8
Agree	35	64.8
Unsure	2	3.7
Disagree	2	3.7
Total	54	100.0



Q8. The teacher has an important role to play in supporting learner autonomy.

Scales	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Agree	23	42.6
Agree	31	57.4
Total	54	100.0



Discussion

The result shows that the lecturers of the Department of English of Bacha Khan University Charsadda, Abdul Wali Khan University Mardan, Hazara University Mansehra and Abbotabad university of science and technology are aware of the concept of learners autonomy and they have positive perspective about promoting learners autonomy in language learning and teaching classrooms because according to the questionnaire a great number of teachers agreed and strongly agreed with the questions number 5, 6, 11, 13, 14 and 15. The result shows that all the teachers totally agree that motivated language learners are more likely to develop learners' autonomy than learners who are not motivated. Moreover all the teachers highlighted the importance of learners' autonomy and they all had very positive attitude towards fostering learners' autonomy in the classrooms.

From all the above result it is clear that all the English teachers of Hazara University Mansehra, Abbotabad University of science and technology, Bacha Khan university charsadda and Abdul Wali khan university Mardan are aware of the concept of learners autonomy and they have positive attitude towards fostering learners autonomy in language learning. They all believed that language classroom should be learner centered in which a learner should take certain kind of decisions like what to learn and how to learn and then how to use it. By doing so students will be motivated and they will learn more effectively. Almost all the teachers believed that language learning depends on learner's autonomy. If the students are not autonomous they cannot learn language. According to these teachers student should learn learning first

and students should also understand this that teacher is not supposed to be with student all the time and they cannot be together for all life. So those learners who are autonomous, they will learn English

Some teachers are of view that autonomy is important but somehow teacher's guidance is also necessary for student to learn a language. All the teachers agreed that autonomy and language teacher education are closely related to one another. A teacher cannot be expected to promote learners autonomy if this teacher by himself or herself is not autonomous.

Observation

The second tool that the researcher selected for data analysis was observation of the classrooms of the teachers who participated in questionnaire. The researcher went to the classrooms and observed the teachers in their classrooms in order to check the validity of their responses. A checklist was prepared for this purpose including 10 items regarding role of teachers in autonomous learning. The teachers were observed whether they foster learner's autonomy in their classrooms or not and their responses were marked in the checklist by the researcher.

The primary purpose was to find the nature of autonomy in the class rooms in the light of responses given by teachers as participants of the study. Another purpose of the observation was to check the autonomy of learners in their classrooms.

After observing the classrooms it was found that some of the teachers were promoting learners autonomy in their classrooms while some of the teachers were completely ignoring it. In some classes it was completely learner centered approach being applied while in some classes it was teacher centered.

The researcher 1st visited the BS classrooms of English department of Abdul Wali Khan University Mardan. There the researcher observed that the students inside the classrooms are given full opportunity to discuss the topic and share their views and ideas regarding the subject. The subject was completely a learner centered classroom where the teacher was not a director but a facilitator. They learners were involved in non-stop quest for good learning activities like general discussion on a specific topic, sharing ideas about an issue or problem discussed in text books and discussing any character or an event in book. Those ideas were shared analyzed and evaluated with the whole class. The role the teacher played in that classroom was not the role of an instructor but the teacher was serving as a facilitator who was motivating the learner to participate in classroom discussion. From this it is clear that in making the students autonomous in learning the role of teacher is necessary. Autonomous learning does not only mean that the learner will learn on their own but they need a teacher who can guide and support them in learning. This shows the validity of their questionnaires. The teachers were fostering learners' autonomy in their classrooms as they agreed with questions in the questionnaire that *Motivated language learners are more likely to develop learner autonomy than learners who are not motivated.*

In the department of English of Bacha Khan University Charsadda, Hazara University Mansehra and Abbotabad University of Science and technology the situation was slight different from Abdul Wali Khan University Mardan. In some classes the teachers were completely fostering autonomy like the students set

their own learning targets and chose their own learning activities with the help of the teachers. While in some classes the situation was quite different. It was just like a one man show. Only the teacher was the authoritative person. He was delivering lecture to the students and the students had to listen it. The teachers used to deliver lecture in English but later they had to translate it into native language in order to make the students understand it more clearly. As far as autonomy regarding language learning is concerned so the teacher continuously encouraged and motivated the students to speak English but the students felt shy to speak English. The students' participation was less in the class and they were hesitant to speak English. The teachers tried to promote learners autonomy in classroom but they still needed a lot to work on it.

Summary of findings

The result obtained from teachers questionnaire shows that the teachers of the department of English of Abdul Wali Khan University Mardan, Hazara University Mansehra, Abbotabad University of science and technology and Bacha Khan University Charsadda are well aware of the concept of learners' autonomy and they have positive attitude towards promoting learners autonomy. According to them teachers awareness play vital role in fostering learners autonomy because if a teacher is not aware of autonomy how can he or she foster autonomy towards his students. The teachers of Abdul Wali Khan University Mardan made it clear that if a teacher encourages the students to make decision about what they want to learn, he or she can foster learner's autonomy in his or her students. They also mentioned that there is a close relationship between learner's

autonomy and teacher's autonomy and that teacher has very much important role in fostering learner's autonomy. Peter who wrote a book on Autonomy and independence in language learning stated that a facilitator always provides two kinds of supports to the learner. One is psycho-social support and another one is technical support. Technical support means helping learners to plan and carry out whatever they want to learn. They help learners in order to evaluate themselves and in acquisition of skills and knowledge.

Psycho-social support means the ability to motivate learner and to raise the ability of learner's awareness regarding autonomy. So the teacher basically is a psycho social and technical supporter to the learners. The teacher needs to play the role of not only an instructor but also a facilitator because autonomous learning is not only learning by their own but learners always needs a teacher in becoming autonomous learners to help them and support them. As a facilitator the teacher it is the responsibility of a teacher to help the students in making learning easy and to make efforts to motivate the students and help them how they will plan and learn language independently. They also need to motivate the learners to learn actively and help learners in acquiring skills and knowledge for language learning autonomously. Facilitating involves encouragement and assessment from teacher and helping learners to remove the doubts and fear of not being able to speak English. The teachers is a language resource during participation in classroom activities that is why it is responsibility of a teacher to ensure the necessary language input and offer help to the students whenever they need it. During the process of learners autonomy the teacher plays the

role of a motivator who motivates the students during learning language and to make them correct if they do any mistake in order to help them to develop their own learning strategies and techniques. The teacher also need to introduce learning materials to the students which can help them in learning such as newspapers, magazines, videos, movies and some other useful websites etc. The teacher needs to select such kind of materials for the students which arise their interests and motivate them and if the students feel any difficulty in learning, the teacher should always be available to provide help.

As most of the teachers strongly agreed with question number 14 that motivated language learners are more likely to develop learner's autonomy than learners who are not motivated. So it means that teachers are aware of the role played by a teacher in making the students autonomous language learners. However 2 teachers disagreed with this because they don't agree with this that motivation by teacher plays any role in making students autonomous. Although they agree that teacher's plays role but it's not that those who are motivated can learn more easily than those who are not motivated.

Similarly while answering to question number 15 that teachers has important role in supporting learners autonomy all the teachers agreed with this and none of them disagreed or strongly disagreed which means that they all are in favor of teachers role in learners autonomy.

Hence from all the discussion and from all the responses from the teachers it is clear that al the teachers are aware of the role played by a teacher in learners autonomy and they agree that teacher is key factor of making students an autonomous language learners. However making the students

autonomous language learners is not an easy thing. In this process the teacher is not only a dominator who takes control of whole class and make it teacher centered classroom but a teacher has to play the role of a director who direct the students to learn positively. It is not that only teachers need and deserve respect but the students also deserve the same thing from the teacher so the teacher must have to take care of these things. He or she has to give impression to the students that they believe on the students and to motivate them that they can do it. Similarly the teacher should must provide such kind of respectful and educational environment in the classroom in which the students can learn foreign language in cooperative and friendly way.

Conclusion

The major findings of this whole study reveal that the teachers of the department of English of Abdul Wali Khan University Mardan, Bacha Khan University Charsadda, Hazara University Mansehra and Abbotabad University of Science and technology have positive attitude towards fostering learner's autonomy in language learning. Concerning the role of teacher in fostering learner's autonomy the teachers believed that there is great role of a teacher in promoting learners autonomy but the students should must have the skills and the ability to become autonomous learners. However they think that autonomy means to give opportunities to the students to make choices about how they learn. But still some teachers disagreed with this, as they think that it is unfeasible to involve students in every decision.

Recommendations

The present investigation has a few confinements. The main restriction is the predetermined number of participants in the present. Future investigations may try

to reproduce the same procedure utilizing a vast example size of members which incorporates both BS level and Masters level students. In order to increase the sample size in addition to English department, teachers of other departments could also be included in the study. Another limitation was the lack of students' questionnaire. It is suggested that the researcher may also use another data collection toll like students questionnaire and teachers interviews in order to obtain more complete picture of role of a teachers in promoting learners autonomy.

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