

## **A Comparison of KP Pakistan and Middle East Universities Perception of Teachers Regarding Learner Autonomy (Cross Cultural Education)**

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### **Introduction**

This research aims to understand the deeper meaning of learners' autonomy and perception of teachers from two different cultures i.e. Middle East culture and Pakistani culture in order to identify and analyse the similarities and differences between the education systems of these two cultures regarding learners autonomy. For this purpose two public sector universities from KPK and research articles of three scholars from Middle East universities like Iraq, Oman and Saudi Arabia were selected. Data was collected from KPK Universities through teachers' interviews which was compared with the researches of Middle East researchers who did their researches on learners' autonomy. Their findings were compared with the findings of current research in order to find out the similarities and differences between education systems of both the regions.

### **Literature Review**

In order to understand foreign language Cross cultural acts as a common goal. Traditional cultural courses, on the other hand, simply present a shallow, homogeneous image of culture. Mild Yagi of the University of Hawaii's Department of ESL looked at two definitions of

culture: shared knowledge and individual variances. He suggested a project to investigate an alternative manner of teaching culture, using the concept of culture as both common knowledge and individual distinctions, based on the ineffectiveness of traditional cultural courses. Five Japanese researchers served as core searchers in his investigation, which looked into the concept of culture. The participants described personal experiences that they believed were caused by cultural differences in daily journal writing and weekly meetings. They shared their previously acquired cultural understanding of Japan and the United States of America. Previous perceptions are difficult to change, according to these data. As a result, traditional cultural activities are insufficient and might occasionally obstruct in-depth crosscultural understanding. Teaching culture, according to Yagi, should begin with an appreciation of cultural variety within one's own nation. Students may realise that each individual belongs to a range of subcultures through seeing diversity, and therefore develops a cultural identity that is both shared and distinctive. About the relationships between teachers and students in a cross-culture

environment, Littlewood (2001) presents his research results that “Asian students are more ready than European students to accept the traditionally dominant role of the teacher. It may be that this tradition is still felt or imposed more strongly in Asia than in Europe.” The classrooms in China and some other Asian countries are different from the ones in western countries. Chinese teachers give lecture with little interaction and students don’t like teachers to ask questions in class.

Phillips, Lo, and Yu (2002) identify three types of learning approaches in terms of students' learning techniques, attitudes and styles, and perceptions of learning: surface approach, deep approach, and accomplishing approach. They discovered that under different settings, Chinese and Asian pupils use different techniques. Exams that are difficult may cause them to use the surface approach. Their Confucian past encourages them to take a deep approach. They are more likely to employ an accomplishing strategy if they are motivated by achievement. Other researchers believe that pupils in East and Southeast Asian nations mainly rely on memory and rote learning (Baumgart and Halse, 1999). Low-level cognitive consequences are the only outcome of this learning approach. Western countries, on the other hand, prioritise deep learning over surface learning (Biggs, 1996). It is commonly acknowledged that western learners are more autonomous, prefer deep and cultural learning, and are encouraged to employ constructivist techniques, whereas Asian learners are more docile, submissive, and adept at rote memorising associated with surface learning

approaches (Baumgart and Halse, 1999). Researchers have discovered that Asian research students do well at western colleges, indicating that they used the deep approach and the accomplishing method in their learning.

Both students and professors recognise and agree that many overseas students require English language assistance during their studies in terms of language and communication (Chalmers and Volet 1997, Eisenchlas and Trevaskes 2003). Because of their weak language abilities and undeveloped interpersonal communication skills, Asian foreign students become mute in group discussions and in the classroom, according to Tiong and Yong (2004). Some researchers also look at how to help overseas students enhance their language abilities (Briguglio 2000).

### Research Questions

The following research questions were answered by the researcher after conducting the whole study.

- Q1. What practices does teachers foster in English Classrooms both in Pakistani Universities and Middle East Universities regarding LA?
- Q2. In what aspect these universities from different regions are similar in fostering learners' autonomy?
- Q3. In what aspect these universities from different regions are different from one another in fostering learners' autonomy?

### Methodology

Although various societies are utilizing their own particular manners and techniques to advance student independence in their classrooms, the

outcomes appear to be the equivalent in all unique circumstances: students lacking student self-sufficiency and having low English capability. Keeping in mind this phenomena of learners' autonomy the present research is based on comparison between Pakistani Universities and Middle East Universities regarding learners' autonomy. For this study the researcher went through intensive reading of the research papers in which studies were performed on learners' autonomy in Middle East countries like Oman, Saudi Arabia and Iraq. The findings of those research papers were then compared with the primary data collected by the researcher from three Universities of KPK Pakistan i.e. Abdul Wali Khan University Mardan and Women University Mardan.

### Research Type

The current research is qualitative in nature. As qualitative research allows a researcher to understand reality from the perspective of participants hence it was considered as the most appropriate approach for the current study because in this study focus is on examining the similarities and differences in the Middle East education and Pakistani Education.

### Research Tools

In the current study two distinct sources of information were used, students' questionnaire and students' classrooms observation. The researcher likewise noticed instructors in their classrooms to check the legitimacy of the students' reactions. The instructors were seen if they encourage learners' autonomy in their classrooms or not. The researcher went to the classes and observed the classroom environment.

### Data Collection Methods:

The primary data was collected by the researcher through teachers' interviews and also through classroom observations from the students of Abdul Wali Khan University Mardan and Women University Mardan.

The secondary data was collected by the researcher from the research papers of **Borg and Al-Busaidi (2012)** who did their research on **Learner Autonomy: English Language Teachers 'Beliefs and Practices** about LA working in the language centre of **Oman**. The second article selected for the data collection was the article of **Shahsavari (2014)** who replicated Borg and Al-Busaidi (2012) with a sample of EFL teachers and students in **Isfahan, Iran**. The third article selected for the study was research paper by **Ansari's (2013)** "**Efficiency, Feasibility and Desirability of Learner Autonomy Based on Teachers' and Learners' Point of Views**" who analysed teachers' views on possibility and practice of LA and challenges in fostering autonomy in **Arab** students.

### Population and Sampling procedures:

Though there are number of Universities in Pakistan but the population selected by the researcher for primary data was two Public sector Universities from KPK Pakistan i.e. Abdul Wali Khan University Mardan and Women University Mardan.

As the comparison was between Middle East Universities and Pakistani universities so the secondary data collected by the researcher for conducting the study were online articles of three researchers who conducted their researches in Iraq, Oman and Saudi Arabia.

**Procedure of data analysis**

Before analysing the data, both the primary and secondary data was organised and was transcribed. As the data collected from Abdul Wali Khan University Mardan and Women University Mardan consisted of oral interviews and observation recordings, so this data with time and resource constraints was transcribed into written form. After that both the primary data and secondary data were compared and contrasted in order to find out the level of autonomous learning in Pakistani Universities and Middle East Universities. The purpose was also to find out the similarities and differences between these two Universities regarding learners' autonomy.

**Data Analysis****Learners' autonomy from the perspective of Pakistani teachers**

As the primary data was collected by the researcher from the teachers of Abdul Wali Khan University Mardan and Women University Mardan through teachers' interview. Teachers of Abdul Wali Khan University Mardan were of the view that learners' autonomy is completely learners' quality. They based their theory on Holec's (1981) idea that LA refers to a learner's ability to direct his or her own learning.

However, respondents expressed independence in two unique ways: in terms of the ability to study without external assistance and in terms of the learner's right and freedom of choice. The solo action without any external support highlighted a learner's ability to learn on their own. One of the teacher was of the view that the learners should be able to deal with situations where outside

assistance is not accessible, and they should be able to get through those challenging situations using their own resources. Another teacher said that learners' autonomy means totally independent action of a student regarding learning. Some teachers explained it further that autonomous learners have the ability to attain their goals, and that instructors' roles should be minimised to the maximum extent possible. According to them the learners attempt to get things with their experiences, and they may face problems without the assistance of teachers.

The teachers of Women University Mardan linked the competence of the learner with the freedom to make independent judgments. In fact they were of the view that if learners are limited by specific circumstances, such as government educational regulations, specified curriculum, and instructional material, they will not be able to take responsibility of their learning, make choices, or lead their learning in the way they want.

A participant, Rakhshi Hasan, characterised LA as "learner competence," "learners' right or power to make decisions," and "learners themselves are capable of defining goals, and they may go for content choice." She suggests that people have the option to choose the resources they want; they may set goals, verify themselves, and evaluate themselves more thoroughly.

Urooba Zeb defined LA, She put the right or power at the centre of LA, which indicates that the student should have the power to guide his own learning, a

learner's ability to remove himself from the constraints of the traditional educational environment. In a culture where teacher-centered learning is the norm, it's disputed if such an ideal self exists.

Dr. Asma and Dr. Kanwal Haqqani said pointed to the practical inconsistency between capacity and freedom of action. They associated learner competence for various activities with freedom of choice. According to them learner's ability alone was insufficient. It would be difficult to be an effective independent learner if one's freedom of action was limited. This leads to the conclusion that learner freedom is linked to learning capacity, and that providing a power of choice appears to be necessary for LA to be realised. Learners' ability to exert control over content deals with the issue of power, which is referred to as the political-critical perspective of LA and is perhaps more difficult than cognitive control and learning management.

### **Learners' autonomy from the perspective of Middle East teachers:**

The secondary data was collected by the researcher from the online articles of those scholars who attempted their researches in the Middle East country like Oman, Iraq and Saudi Arabia in the field of learners' autonomy.

Borg and Al-Busaidi (2012) investigated the views and practises of 61 English instructors in Oman's language centre concerning LA work. They designed a comprehensive survey to look into five topics: learners' perceptions of LA, the relationship between LA and SLA, the desirability and feasibility of autonomy in

learners, learners' current condition, and teachers' real practises. The findings revealed that instructors' perceptions of LA were mostly psychological, emphasising the learner's ability to monitor, assess, confidence, and motivation, followed by a focus on technical, and social perspectives, while they were less confident in cooperative skills. There was also a strong emphasis on taking responsibility, exercising control, demonstrating independence, and exercising choice and freedom. According to the findings, there is a bias toward individualist views on autonomy, which is consistent with earlier findings. Teachers were enthusiastic about the role of LA in language learning, believing that autonomous learners are more motivated, devoted, and focused, and can take advantage of every learning opportunity. Majority of them (76.6 percent) said they foster autonomy in a variety of methods, including enlightening students about its importance, encouraging them to be independent and reflect on their learning, and using activities. Teachers assessed their students' current position and, as a result, were divided in their opinions, finding a lack of learner motivation, curricular limits, and a learning culture that hampered learners' autonomy.

Borg and Al-Busaidi (2012) were replicated by Shahsavari (2014) with a group of EFL teachers and students in Isfahan, Iran. Having a convenience sample of 150 teachers with a bachelor's degree in TEFL and five years of teaching experience, and 150 learners with a bachelor's degree. Both the professors and the students had never visited a foreign

nation. The researcher looked at their perspectives on the relevance of LA in learning a second language, as well as how desired and practical it was to achieve LA. Almost all teachers and students believed that emphasising the importance of autonomy in language learning was effective, according to her research. Teachers' and students' perspectives on how much students should be involved in various elements of learning differed. Teachers rated student involvement as more desirable and practicable in topic selection, but least desirable and achievable in classroom management and instructional methods. Learners regarded classroom management, teaching methods, course subjects, and objectives more desirable and achievable, but less desirable and feasible participation in assessment, tasks, and teaching material.

Furthermore, teachers found learners' abilities to be quite realistic in all areas except evaluating oneself and autonomous learning, while learners found monitoring themselves to be more difficult than others. Despite their enthusiasm, both teachers and students discovered a gap between the desirability and feasibility of learners' involvement in learning decisions, as well as their capacities to do so. The strength of this study is that it involves both teachers and students, however there are only a few methodological issues that need to be addressed. The lack of information on the sample, the number of learners interviewed, and an appendix with the interview technique limits the study's utility.

Teachers' perspectives on the possibility and practise of LA, as well as problems in encouraging autonomy in Arab students, were examined by Ansari (2013). He gathered the opinions of 60 English teachers at the university level using a 30-item questionnaire that asked about the current state of learners' autonomous practise, instructional tactics used, and future opportunities to enhance LA. The existing circumstance was disheartening in terms of their motivational level and class involvement, according to the findings. Teachers prefer a learner-centered approach and student participation in group discussions, but they believe that poor teaching facilities and low student quality are the issues they encounter. Teachers offered professional development, learner training, and reflection on the learning-teaching process as ways to improve the situation.

### Results and Discussion

There is a discussion and analysis of the findings to see if there is a significant difference in how Pakistani and Middle East teachers perceive learners' autonomy. The responses of both Pakistani and Middle East teachers were analysed and observed by the researcher in order to find out that what the views of Pakistani and Middle East teachers are when it comes to fostering learners' autonomy. After that the researcher highlighted the similarities and difference between the teachers of these two opposite continents.

According to Pakistani teachers the classroom doesn't need to be completely learner centered. The teacher need to play the role of instructor not a director. The student should not depend on the direction



of teacher. They should be given opportunity to participate in discussions as learners by themselves are responsible for autonomous lean. It is a learner based quality. They said that autonomous learning means without the assistance of teachers, and this right and freedom should be given to the students by the teacher. These teachers were of the view that such environment should be provided to the students where they do not need any external assistance. Some teachers were of the view that autonomous learning means when learners have the ability to attain their goals. According to them learners get things with experience and they may face certain problems without the assistance of teachers.

Women University Mardan teachers added further to the discussion that it is the ability and competence of a learner to make autonomous judgements but they also added that learners in Pakistan are limited to specific circumstances, such as government educational rules and regulations which the learners have to follow. The curriculum is specified, even if the teachers are in favour of promoting learner autonomy, they are bound by the institutions. The learners are not able to take responsibility of their learning, make choices, or lead their learning in the way they want.

According to these teachers learners' autonomy is something that is not natural or psychological. It is an unnatural phenomena which is the need of nowadays technological era and it should be practiced in the classroom. Some of these teachers were of the view that if a student is given freedom to select learning

material, he should also be involved in methodology of teaching that material. They said that classrooms in Pakistan are completely teacher and subject centered. The students are learning only bookish knowledge and they are following only teachers' methodology which is why promoting learners autonomy has become slight difficult for teachers.

In Oman teachers thought of learners autonomy as psychological. It emphasises the learners' ability to monitor. Theses teachers said that the students are less competent in working effectively with other people on equal basis. However these teachers like Pakistani teachers also emphasized on learners' freedom, showing independence and taking control. They were very positive about contribution of learners' autonomy. They said that autonomous learners are very motivated, committed and focused. Majority of Oman teachers claimed that they promote learners autonomy by informing the learners about independent learning and its importance. Though like Pakistani teachers these teachers were in favour of learners' autonomy but they were also bound to the curriculum constraints. Because of these constraints learners were not motivated towards autonomous learning. That is the reason these teachers found autonomy desirable than feasible.

In Isfahan, Iran there was slight difference between teachers promoting autonomous learning and learners being autonomous. According to these teachers in selection of topics students involvement is important but how these topics should be thought to the students and classroom management should be completely in control of

teachers. When the same question was asked from the students their response was opposite to the response of teachers as they were in favour of involvement in teaching methodology not selection of topic. So there was a gap between the learners and teachers point of view.

In Arab the situation was completely different. These teachers were in favour of learner centered approach as they felt that poor teaching facilities are the main problem they face that's why the classroom should be learner centered.

#### **Similarities between Pakistani and Middle East teachers regarding learners' autonomy**

Both Pakistani and Middle East teachers were of the view that learners should be given freedom. The teachers of both regions emphasize on showing independence and taking control of learning material by learners. Rather it has been cleared by Pakistani teachers that taking control doesn't mean that the classroom should be wholly learner centered. Learners should be given opportunity to select teaching methodology which is understandable for the students and which they can get easily. Another similarity found in the teachers of these two regions is that both teachers were against the curriculum that has been imposed by the government on the institutions. According to these teachers if the students have to follow that curriculum, they can never be autonomous learners as they will be bound to the specified curriculum and instructional materials.

Both the teachers were also in favour that learners' autonomy means learning without teachers' assistance however

Pakistani teachers clarified that teachers role should be the role of an instructor not a director.

The teachers of Pakistan and Middle East clarified that autonomous learners as compared to other learners and students are very motivated, committed and focused.

#### **Differences between Pakistani and Middle East teachers regarding Learners autonomy**

The very first difference that has been found by the researcher in the teachers of both regions is that Pakistani teachers were of the view that learners autonomy is something that is practiced pre-planned in the classroom by the teacher and it has nothing to do with the psychology of teacher or learner. However Middle East teachers said that LA is psychological because this emphasises the ability of the learner to monitor his confidence and motivation.

Another difference was that the teachers of Pakistan are of the view that teacher the students should be involved in both learning material as well as teaching that material. He should be autonomous in both the processes because only this is way we can promote autonomous learning regarding English language. Whereas Middle East teachers were against this concept. They said that though students can be involved in selecting learning material for themselves but how to teach this material should depend on the teacher. The Middle East teachers said that the classrooms in Middle East are learner centered as the poor teaching facilities are the main problem they are facing that is why they are in favour of learner centered



classrooms. However in Pakistan the teachers said that the classrooms are completely teacher centered and subject centered which is why it is difficult to promote autonomous learning. The students are facing curriculum constraints imposed by governments and they have to follow the specific curriculum and learning materials.

### Conclusion and Recommendations

It has been found by the researcher that there are some strong and weak areas in the teaching of both the regions. The reasons behind these areas are sometimes government constraints regarding curriculum, instructional materials, poor teaching facilities and less opportunities to the students. It has also been observed that in Pakistani any private institutes the curriculum as well as teaching methodology is assigned to the teachers which the teacher has to strictly follow. The teacher cannot do any amendments in that methodologies. He/she is ordered to include the mentioned activities, methodologies or even examples in the teaching. In this situation it becomes quite difficult for the teacher to promote learners autonomy because the teacher by himself is not autonomous. Same is the situation on Middle East. The teachers are facing poor teaching facilities because of which they favour learner centered approach. The learners are given not only the autonomy but the full control of classrooms.

The government need to take certain steps regarding promoting learners' autonomy. In this new technological era it is important to make the students independent learners and to stop providing

them only bookish knowledge. The teachers should give equal opportunities to students to participate in discussions especially in government institutes. Also the teaching facilities should be provided to the teachers. Teachers should reflect their own roles and should behave like instructors not the directors. Self-assessment should be encouraged in students by the teachers.

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