

Learner Autonomy and Teacher Development
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Abstract

Teacher's role is indispensable in the life of a student as behind the success of every student, there stands a teacher. Teaching is one way of learning and it is a two-way process as it benefits both teacher and learner. The teacher's development largely depends upon the learner's growth and the knowledge acquired by them. Teachers develop themselves by making the learners reach their goal. Learner autonomy and teacher development go hand in hand. Self Access Centers play a vital role in the development of an autonomous learner of language. The autonomous learner excels in learning and the teacher improves in various ways such as the designing of sources for such Self Access Centers. Though there are many sources available, the Self Access Centers are very helpful, and it helps the teacher update their knowledge in the field of teaching. This paper vividly portrays how the autonomous learner in language learning and Self Access Centers pave the way for teacher development.

Key words: Autonomous learner, Self Access Center.

Introduction

Teacher facilitates learner by playing multi-roles such as organizer, assessor, prompter, tutor, and observer. Hence teachers can be called as facilitator or counselor. Teacher has the responsibility to kindle the independent thinking of each learner. They are responsible for making the learners self-evaluate and show them the availability of various strategies for learning. Hence autonomous learners are to be encouraged, as they make use of the sources to the maximum and take responsibility for their own learning. Various strategies of training can be undergone by the learners to master LSRW skills in language learning. Self Access centers play a major role in autonomous learning and by preparing material for SACs the teacher does truly benefit. Since the English language has been the international language, surviving in any field is

not possible without the knowledge of English Language. Hence, learner autonomy in language learning has become mandatory. Learner autonomy has become popular over the last decades, especially in the field of language learning; and autonomous learner takes an active part in the language learning. Therefore, this paper discusses learner autonomy in language learning.

Learner Autonomy

An autonomous learner is also known as Self-directed learner. Self-directed learners

- ‘know their needs and work productively with the teacher towards the achievement of their objectives’
- ‘learn both inside and outside the classroom’
- ‘can take classroom-based material and build on it’
- ‘know how to use resources independently’
- ‘learn with active thinking’
- ‘adjust their learning strategies when necessary to improve learning’
- ‘manage and divide the time, learning properly’
- ‘learn with active thinking’
- ‘adjust their learning strategies when necessary to improve learning’
- ‘don’t think the teacher is god who can give them ability to master the language’

(Hedge, 2000, p.76).

Autonomous learners do not remain passive recipients of knowledge, but use their abilities to take on more responsibility for learning. Hence they are considered good language learners. Motivating such learners will bring out better learning strategies. “Autonomy is a situation in which the learner is totally responsible for all the decisions concerned with his or her learning and the implementation of those decisions” (Leslie Dickinson)

The Need for Learner Autonomy

Learning can happen when learners are willing to contribute. Learner should realize and accept that success in learning depends as much as on the student as on the teacher. Their success depends upon their responsible attitude for learning, their interest and independent thinking.

Learner autonomy and self evaluation help to find their level of proficiency and expand their

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own ability. Moreover, an autonomous learner is able to find his/her own plus and minus which give way for his/her self development. Learner autonomy in language learning works well and it provides the way for the learner to master the four skills such as Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing.

Learner Autonomy and LSRW

Mastering a language needs the development of the four skills Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing. An autonomous learner needs to develop his/her four skills to master the English Language. An independent learner can develop his/her own source material which can provide ample platform for the development of the four necessary skills. On the other hand, the independent learners can join together and prepare materials and share with each other. Group work always makes learning fruitful and most times successful..

Learner Autonomy and Reading Skill

Independent learners or autonomous learners can create a group among themselves and share their ideas and views. They can choose news articles and small narratives and read them aloud. The others can listen to the reading and note down the errors the reader makes. They can also have an eye on the pronunciation of each and every word uttered. Referring Pronunciation Dictionaries are useful and it helps the reader rectify the errors later. As they read, the other learners can note down the strange words they come across. If the article is on a short story or some narrative, it will kindle the interest of the learner. Self Access centers have plenty of such sources. The learner should know how to access them.

Learner Autonomy and Writing Skill

In learning a language, group work always has its result. A group of autonomous learners overlooked by a teacher can perform miracles. Before getting involved in writing, one has to develop his/her vocabulary. The learner should have expanded his/her vocabulary. Wide reading is the right strategy for the expansion of vocabulary. Composition writing is largely helpful in developing one's writing skill. Expanding on a theme and narrating an incident or a short story in writing are largely helpful. They can also expand the headline news they come across.

Learner Autonomy and Speaking Skill

Speaking skill is the most essential skill in language learning. Learners should realize that unless they speak, they cannot develop their language. Interviewing each other is one of the interesting strategies. The autonomous learners can play the role of their favorite person and speak out. Assuming a situation and conversing accordingly will also be helpful. The teacher can also suggest some latest topics on which the speaker can write extempore speeches. Debates based on any controversial topics can also be conducted.

Learner Autonomy and Listening Skill

As far as English language learning is concerned, exposure to native speakers has its benefit. The learners should be made to listen to various speeches delivered by native speakers. They can also listen to a story or any anecdote. Video clippings can be played and questions can be raised based on the video clippings. This process helps verifying their listening ability.

Teacher's Role

The role of teacher is indispensable in the life of a learner. The teacher has to study the learners' group and analyze their level and need. Making masters of the learners in all four skills has become a challenging job for the teacher and they develop themselves while designing the course materials. Designing tasks, preparing course materials and so on, according to the level of the students, will benefit the teachers themselves.

When self reflection is done by the teacher, there is chance for improvement in attitude and methods of teaching. The teacher has to be aware that the change in teaching is not abrupt but a gradual one. If the change in the method of teaching is acceptable to the learners, the teacher can become familiar and the students can have admiration for such teachers. Giving rewards and punishments, motivating the learners, making the learners self-evaluate pave the way for teachers to find out their real skills. Showing the availability of the sources and strategies helps teachers to be aware of the existing sources and to determine how they will help both learners and the teacher.

Self-Access Centers

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Self-Access Center, otherwise known as Open Learning Centre, is the adjunct to classroom learning. It gives room for learner involvement. According to Harmer (2001) in Self Access Centers students can work on their own with a large number of sources which ranges from grammar reference and workbook type tasks, to cassette tapes and video excerpts. It has a large collection of learner literature, reading texts and listening materials. Students can access it in their spare time. When they enter into it, they decide what work to do, find the right kind of material and settle down to complete the learning tasks. Self Access Center makes the students learn themselves and realize their own role in learning. Such Self Access Centers pave the way for teacher development also. Language learning can be acquired faster through the activities, games and tasks and the SACs do have those in abundance.

Teacher Development

Teachers and learners are dependent upon each other for their development. Success of a teacher is revealed when a student reaches his/her target. An autonomous learner goes to SACs, which pave the way for teacher development also. It is the duty of the teacher to understand the psychology, expectation and needs of the learners. SACs fulfill the needs and expectations of the learner as it provides ample sources. The teachers can get themselves involved in preparing such sources and thus improve their own knowledge. Being an active creator of his or her own material, the teacher also develops. While preparing such sources, the teacher has to consider the extent to which a given tasks or source material can reveal variations in learner's success.

A teacher can prepare:

- Reading cards contain newspaper or magazine articles
- Tasks which enhances language learning. It has to be designed with goals and objectives which fulfill the needs of the learner.
- Quizzes, questions with key answers
- Activities that improve the LSRW skills. Interesting narratives, anecdotes that may enthrall the learners.
- Writing tasks based on recent occurrences in and around the world may benefit both teacher and the learner.
- Study materials which interest the learners in learning the target language

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- Create topics, speak on the topic, record it and play it in the presence of the learner. This can motivate them to speak.

They can also

- Conduct games that entertain as well as educate the learners.
- Create simple resources and design courses.
- Record the native speakers' voice and pronunciation of speech sounds and let the learners listen to it.
- Conduct online courses related to language learning, due to the improvement in technology.

Teachers' development largely depends upon the input they put forth themselves.

Teachers can avail themselves with the latest technological tools for preparing learning sources. As far as syllabus designing is concerned, self-directed approach on the part of the teacher has to be encouraged. The teacher has to adopt learner-centered approaches in teaching language. The teacher has to be aware that the curriculum must be characterized by the involvement of the learner.

Conclusion

It is mandatory on the part of the teachers to consider themselves as learners so as to develop themselves. Teacher and the learner should share the responsibility for the better outcome. Earlier the teachers needed knowledge in language, but now they need to be trained in current methodologies. Self-Access Centre is a good source for teacher development. Apart from creating materials for Self-Access Centers, the teachers can involve themselves in action research, which is based on any issue or problem. Mapping can be done, because it involves observation and the collection of evidence about their teaching methodology. After mapping is done the teacher should focus on specific teaching problems, which can be rectified. Keeping in mind the fact that learners' development depends upon them, the teachers have to work on it. There is no doubt that SAC is a good source of teacher as well as learner development. Apart from all these, the teacher has to create awareness among the learners that the inborn talent and abilities of the learner would be suppressed if they are spoon-fed.

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