



RESEARCH PAPER

Role of Learner Autonomy in Enhancing Language Proficiency among BS English Learners of Southern Punjab: A Teacher's Perspective

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ABSTRACT

The objective of this study is to emphasize the significance of fostering learner autonomy among second language learners, particularly focusing on BS English students in six universities in Southern Punjab. The aim is to investigate how promoting autonomy can contribute to enhancing language proficiency. Encouraging language learners to become autonomous is a crucial academic goal with potential benefits for language proficiency. The researchers conducted semi-structured interviews with 20 practicing teachers from these universities to explore the extent to which learner autonomy is promoted in the classrooms. Thematic analysis was employed to analyze the interview data and draw meaningful insights. The findings from the data analysis suggest a promising scope for implementing learner autonomy practices in BS English classrooms in Southern Punjab. Additionally, respondents expressed the need for changes in the existing curriculum and assessment techniques within these universities.

KEYWORDS Autonomy, Learning Strategies, Self-Assessment, Self-Directed Learning

Introduction

The word Autonomy is political in nature and Greek in origin where it was used to describe the rights of conquered cities to maintain their law and order (Huang & Benson, 2013). Autonomy in learning is deep-rooted in Eastern and Western philosophy. Philosophers like Rousseau, Galileo, Ivan Illich, and John Dewey urged promoting autonomy as a learning goal (Benson, 2001). It can be defined as a strategy that can enhance the learning proficiency and creativity of a learner. Pakistani learners of English as a second language have certain level of motivation to learn English mostly for extrinsic reasons but their proficiency level is not up to the mark. They are unable to compete for jobs in international market. Learner autonomy can be used as a learning strategy to make learners responsible and lifelong learners. Though it is a western concept yet it can be successfully practiced in Asian countries also.

Components of Learner autonomy

Different components like confidence, cognitive and meta-cognitive abilities, willingness to work in collaboration and self-assessment are considered as building blocks of learner autonomy. Here confidence refers to positive self-image of ones learning experience. Cognitive abilities develop your mental connection with learning material and learning process. Meta-cognitive abilities are actually learning skills like planning, monitoring and assessment. Here assessment means developmental assessment that becomes an integral part of learning process. It refers both to teacher assessment and self-assessment that gives you an insight and feedback about your learning process.

In Pakistan, classroom is usually controlled and dominated by teachers. Learners are almost always passive listeners with little or no role to perform. They remain dependent upon their teachers for all the learning process including learning material and activities. Idea of learner autonomy seems strange to Pakistani learners of English as second language. Research indicates (Sakai & Takagi, 2009) that learner autonomy as strategy can enhance language learning proficiency, independence and creativity of language learners. In our educational system teaching learning process follows strict disciplinary restrictions leaving very small room for teacher or learner to practice learner autonomy. Aim of the researcher is to explore the possibility and to evaluate room for learner autonomy and self-assessment, working within the policy restrictions of regulatory authorities.

Literature Review

Learner autonomy as a concept came in applied linguistics from mainstream psychology and educational theory. Learner autonomy as a language learning strategy attracted the attention of language teachers and Linguists in 1960's. Council of Europe's modern language project gave birth to this concept at CRAPEL, University of Nancy France (Benson, 2007). Henry Holec was director at CRAPEL at that time where he submitted his report and introduced his most cited definition (Holec, 1981). He defines the construct as "the ability to take charge of one's own learning". This definition sees autonomy as a learner's attribute instead of taking it as a learning situation (Dickinson, 1987). Benson (2011) modified the definition of Holec by replacing the word "ability" to "capacity" and he used the phrase "to control" instead of "take charge of". He preferred the word "control" because this word helps in developing a correlation between learner autonomy and various themes of educational theories. Nation (2001) elaborates the term learner autonomy by asserting that autonomous language learners exhibit responsibility and take control of their learning. For a deeper understanding of the construct, we analyze the key terms used by Benson in his definition. These terms are *capacity* and *control*. According to Benson, capacity is actually the potential of a person to perform some task. It is not what he/she actually does. It should not be confused with a set of learning behavior. Set of learning behavior is a term that we use for autonomous learning. A person will exhibit this capacity or potential if she/he wishes to do so and if she/he is free to show this behavior. The capacity to control learning therefore has three main components. First is ability, second is desire and third is freedom. On the other hand the term ability refers to knowledge of learning skills. It needs meta-cognitive learning skills like planning, monitoring and evaluation (Holec, 1981). The second requirement is knowledge of the second language they are aspiring to learn. In technical terms, meta-cognitive and meta-linguistic skills and knowledge are building blocks of ability (Little, 97). Next component is desire. Desire, in this context, means the intensity of the learner's intention. Whereas freedom refers to space that is available to learners by specific agents or learning situation that control their learning. Different users of this term modified and added to the interpretation of the construct. Changes in language learning theories, employment demands and learning objectives have also added to the meaning of this construct. Benson (1997) for the first time introduced different versions or representations of the construct autonomy. He used three terms namely: technical, psychological and political.

As mentioned earlier Benson prefers the word 'control' instead of 'take charge of' to define autonomy. His term 'control' refers to three aspects of learning process. These are learning content, cognitive processing, and learning management. Technical in this paradigm therefore refers to learning management. The setup of the classroom, the seating plan, and other elements are included. The term psychological describes cognitive functions and the use of various learning techniques. By "political," he means that students

have a right to select learning resources and teaching strategies. Later on different researchers made their own distinctions but the crux of the issue remained the same. Ribe (2003) came with his own distinctions on the basis of 'convergence', 'divergence-convergence' and 'convergence-divergence' positions. Another distinction came from O'Rourke and Schwienhorst (2003). They introduced 'individual-cognitive', 'social-interactive' and 'exploratory-participatory versions'. Oxford (2003) modified and expanded the versions previously introduced by Benson. She added social-interactional aspect of learner autonomy. Benson—concludes this discussion that all the aspects of learner autonomy are equally important and each expert cut the cake according to his choice.

The Rationale for Learner Autonomy

Making learners autonomous is a desirable education goal. Little (2003) has discussed this issue of rationale for learner autonomy. He asserts that a focused and responsible learner will pursue his educational goals with more vigor and vitality. Secondly he says that when a person is encouraged to set his own learning goals following his own learning needs, his motivation increases and his learning proficiency is improved. Thirdly an autonomous language learner feels free to communicate in target language and thus puts his linguistic competence into practice. This activity results in fluency. In this way he gets rid of language anxiety and becomes confident. Naiman et al (1978) re-affirm the opinion of Little (2003) by declaring that autonomous learning is more productive as compared to other approaches of language learning. Little (1995) addresses the issue of learner autonomy keeping in view the scenario of formal education. According to him, practice of learner autonomy solves the issue of learning and the art of learning at the same time. Two important reasons have been highlighted to promote learner autonomy: First, in certain situations, teacher is not available to guide and instruct the students. Second rationale is that learner autonomy makes the learners capable of performing better in real life situation. Nation and Macalister (2010) reaffirmed the idea by asserting that autonomy lends the learners the capacity to know "how to learn a language and how to monitor and be aware of their learning, so that they can become effective and independent language learners" (p. 38).

Material and Methods

For the current study, the researchers chose a qualitative approach utilizing semi-structured interviews as a tool. According to Gary Anderson (2005), "qualitative research is a type of inquiry that investigates phenomena in their natural settings and employs a variety of methods to interpret, comprehend, explain, and give meaning to them." Ruane, Janet (2006) stated that the interview is valid as a research instrument, saying, "Of all the data collection techniques available in our search for information, the interview strikes many as the single best device for promoting understanding and getting at the truth." A semi-structured interview gives the researcher flexibility and openness which is hall mark of descriptive research. On the contrary, no such freedom is available to the interviewer or interviewee in organized interviews with strictly predetermined questions (Berg & Lune, 2014). Researchers like Rubin and Rubin (2005); and Kavale (1996,2003) assert that interview enables the researcher to study human beliefs and behaviors in detail. Dornyei (2007) favors interview as it helps researchers in forming a hypothesis. Weiss (1994) thinks that interview has a key role in qualitative research design.

Research Setting and Population

The study was carried out in Southern Punjab. Interviews were conducted with English teachers working in universities in Southern Punjab. Twenty teachers from various universities who taught BS English programs were interviewed. Almost 80% of the respondents were taken from public sector universities and 20% were from private sector universities. The majority of the respondents (80%) were PhDs while all the others (20%) were M.Phil. 70% of the teachers had teaching experience of ten or more than ten years.

Data Analysis

The study collected qualitative data and required descriptive or thematic analysis. After an extensive study of the text, data was reduced to themes, categories and then codes. Most of the analysis was done manually. Nvivo pro was used to draw word clouds for different codes. After sifting the interview data thoroughly the researcher divided it into 5 themes and 23 codes. These themes are as follows: (1) Perception of the construct, (2) Autonomous learning behavior, (3) Impact of autonomy on language proficiency, (4) Learner autonomy in our classrooms and (5) Practical application of the concept.

Results and Discussion

Theme	Codes
Perception of the construct	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Learner centered classroom ➤ Self-directed learning ➤ Interactive learning

Perception of the construct

Different researchers have given different definitions to explain the construct. But here the researcher is concerned about how university teachers of Southern Punjab perceive this concept. This theme has been further divided into codes. These codes are Learner-centered classroom, learner's responsibility, and self-directed learning. These codes have their sub-codes. First, we take the code, learner-centered classroom.

Learner-centered classroom

40% of the respondents said that to them learner autonomy was a learner-centered classroom. While explaining a learner-centered classroom they said that in such a classroom learners' involvement and participation are maximum. In a learner-centered classroom, we observe a change in the teacher-learner relationship. They also said that in such a classroom, learner is in control of his learning. He is involved in the decision-making process. For instance, respondent no #12 explained a learner-centered classroom in the following words

"In a learner-centered classroom (where) learner enjoys the power of decision-making about what will be taught and how it will be taught. It is decided to keep in view their needs, dispositions, and abilities".

Respondent no # 7 explains the process of learner autonomy in the following words:

“First we have to make them aware of the concept. We should give them an opportunity to participate in the learning process and finally we have to make them responsible for their own learning”.

Respondent no # 11 expressed his perceptions about the construct in the following words:

“To my perception, the learner-centered approach is learner autonomy. They (learners) should be given space in decision-making and changing and adopting teaching methods. It is an interactive mode of teaching in which learner is made part of teaching process”.

All these aspects of learner autonomy discussed by the interviewees are in line with Benson and Voller (1997) who have divided the construct into five categories such as inborn capacity, self-directed learning, and set of skills used in self-directed learning. The respondents mostly focused on classroom learning of the concept and neglected the aspects like out-of-class learning or life-long learning.

Self-directed Learning

Self-directed learning was the next code that was derived from interviewee's discussion while explaining their perceptions about the construct. 30% of the respondents said that autonomous learning was self-directed learning. They discussed life-long learning, self-monitoring, and self-assessment as components of self-directed learning. For instance respondent 15 said that it was self-directed learning in which learners were given opportunities to make decisions regarding their learning. According to him, it was life-long learning as in self-directed learning, a learner learns by himself. He also discussed self-assessment and self-monitoring as basic ingredients of self-directed learning. This perception of teachers about the construct of learner autonomy is in line with Dickenson (1987) who affirms that self-directed learning is also a mode of learner autonomy. It is because self-directed learning also calls for a responsible behavior on the part of learners.

Interactive Learning

30% of the interviewees said that it was interactive and activity-based learning. While discussing this aspect of learner autonomy they discussed related learning methodologies like group work, peer work creative learning, and problem-solving approach. For instance, respondent no # 12 explained this concept in the following words:

“If the teacher is willing to involve the learner in the teaching process, certainly there would be group discussion, topics beyond the syllabus, and peer work also. There will be presentations and those presentations not be controlled by the teacher. So autonomy will enhance their communicative skills and expressions”.

Respondent no # 4 has explained this aspect of learner autonomy in the following words:

“The celebrated and seasoned teachers have given a formula that learner autonomy will occur when eighty percent of the task in the classroom will be done by the learners themselves. So most of the tasks and most of the teaching-learning jobs should be performed by the learners. They should not be provided notes. Notes make them handicapped”.

These findings also find their support in literature. Smith (2003a); Yasmeeen (2018) assert that group work and task based learning help learners become autonomous and increase their proficiency as learners. Benson (2007) says that Asian teachers and learners

prefer collaborative approaches to enhance learner autonomy. Lei and Khan (2012) advise teachers to put their learners to activity while they should be present to watch, listen and encourage them.



Word cloud 1 shows teacher's perceptions about the construct learner autonomy

Autonomous learning behavior

Theme	Codes
Autonomous learning behavior	➤ Raising questions
	➤ Searching learning material
	➤ Sharing responsibilities
	➤ Ownership and agency

The second theme that we derived from interview data is autonomous learning behavior. In this theme, we have developed the following codes to discuss this behavior. These codes are 1) Raising questions; 2) Searching for learning material; 3) Sharing responsibilities; 4) Ownership and agency

Raising Questions

Almost all the interviewees discussed this quality of learners as autonomous behavior. The crux of their discussion was that when a learner raises a question in the classroom, he indicates involvement, participation, curiosity, and confidence. In this regards respondent no #5 says:

"First of all, he must be able to raise the question. He should be able to put the question to the teacher. Not only about the things he is not understanding, but also about the things he is understanding. To show that he is learning. When a learner raises a question, you know, he is trying to satisfy his curiosity. I think critical thinking and power to ask the question are two basic characteristics".

Respondent no # 1 discussed some of the qualities of autonomous learners in the following words:

"Confidence, responsibility, awareness, involvement, and reflective learning are some of the characteristics of an autonomous learner. Autonomous learners ask questions and try to be in touch with their teachers outside the classroom. They also make learning groups of like-minded students".

These perceptions are in line with Hedge (2000) who says that an autonomous learner is aware of his needs and remains active and responsible inside and outside the classroom.

Searching Learning Material

Another attribute of autonomous learners according to interviewees was searching for learning material. Respondents said that autonomous learners are not dependent on teachers for providing learning material. They sift different resources including online resources to search and choose material for their study. Respondent no # 9 discusses autonomous learning behavior in the following words:

“An autonomous learner makes use of the internet and explores online resources to choose the content of learning. They sift language teaching sites. But to my knowledge very few students, one or two from an entire class take this trouble”.

Respondent no # 18 describes this aspect of autonomous learning in the following words:

“So in my view, autonomous learners are interactive and confident. They consult some other resources than a teacher. These resources may be online resources or online books or U tube lectures. Sometimes they have the choice of attending classes of other teachers also. Sometimes they also consult teachers outside the classroom”.

Sharing the responsibility of the teacher

Sharing responsibility of the teacher was also discussed as an attribute of autonomous learners. This aspect indicated restructuring of the language classroom and a political-critical perspective of autonomous learning. Interviewees said that autonomous learners are not passive consumers of knowledge in the class. They participate in the process of decision-making. Respondent no # 14 discussed this quality of autonomous learners in his interview. He said:

“On the whole, they behave in the class as logical and analytical learners. They are responsible and motivated learners. They maintain good relations with their teachers. They help their teachers in performing classroom activities”.

These attributes have been discussed by Wenden (1991) who says that autonomous learners are motivated and keen on searching for learning material.

Having ownership and agency

Ownership and agency have also been discussed as characteristics of an autonomous learner. They try to make their learning relevant to them with the help of need analysis. They also choose content that is relevant to their needs. For instance, respondent no # 9 described the qualities of an autonomous learner that go very close to the concept of ownership and agency. He says:

“Autonomous language learners should have decision-making power. They should also know their learning outcomes. They have the ability to select their course content...and adjust their learning”.

Similarly, respondents no# 9 and 12 discussed the component of need analysis to make learning relevant to the learner. Respondent no # 9 goes even to the extent of saying:

“To me, autonomy is all about need analysis. If this element is lacking then no autonomy exists among our learners”.

If we compare our findings with previous literature, we see that Benson (2007) is of the view that agency is starting point from where learner autonomy originates. Huang (2009, 2011) reiterates the same view point construction of identity may serve as starting point for learner autonomy.

Word cloud 2 showing characteristics of an autonomous learner



Word cloud 2 describes the characteristics of an autonomous learner as perceived by our respondents.

Learner autonomy in our classrooms

Theme	Codes
Learner autonomy in our classrooms	➤ Desirability among learners
	➤ Desirability among teachers
	➤ Feasibility

Desirability

The next theme that we are going to discuss is the present status of learner autonomy in our classroom. We discuss it with the help of two codes. These codes are desirability and feasibility of practicing learner autonomy. First comes the desirability of learner autonomy. Desirability again has two dimensions: desirability among learners and desirability among our teachers. On this issue of desirability, opinion is divided among our interviewees/teachers. The majority of the teachers the researcher met with were of the view that at present no such desire exists among our teachers and learners. Some interviewees said that some sort of desirability exists among our learners but teachers show no such desire at all.

Feasibility

The next code of this category is the issue of feasibility of practicing learner autonomy in our classrooms. On the issue of feasibility, opinion remained divided among interviewees. Majority of the interviewees agreed that it is feasible to practice learner autonomy in our classrooms provided that certain changes are made and certain steps are taken. So, this code describes the opinions of interviewees regarding feasibility and discusses suggestions. Respondent 4, for example, expressed his opinion that it was feasible. He said:

“Yes, it is feasible. There are noble examples and instances among teachers and learners. There are teachers you know who are immersed in their jobs. Similarly, there are students dedicated to their studies. Some teachers are working for the development of learner autonomy and students who are working for the attainment of learner autonomy”.

Respondent 14 said that it is feasible provided certain steps are taken to make it a success. He said:

“Issue of feasibility has been a subject of heated controversy because you have to teach crowded classrooms with fewer teaching aids. If proper teaching aids are provided, classes are small in size this idea can be popularized”.

(Examples)

Requirements to make it feasible

Theme	Codes
Requirements to make it feasibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Awareness of the concept ➤ Teacher training ➤ Teacher autonomy ➤ Changes in assessment techniques ➤ Restructuring syllabus and curriculum

During the discussion on the desirability of practicing learner autonomy in our classrooms, most of the interviewees expressed their concerns about the present state of affairs in our institutes and classrooms. The same concerns were repeated when they discussed the issue of the feasibility of implementing this dynamic concept in our classrooms. All agreed that certain changes and improvements were necessary to make our learners autonomous and reap the benefits of learner autonomy. The researcher combined all those suggestions and made a code with the name “Requirements” These will be discussed with the help of following codes.

Awareness of the Concept

The first apprehension that came to the discussion was a lack of awareness about the concept among our teachers. As the role of a teacher is vital to promote autonomy among our learners, a lack of awareness reduces its chances of success. Respondent no # 13 who recently completed his thesis on a topic relevant to autonomy expressed the following views about the issue of awareness:

“My observation is that they (teachers) are not aware of the objectives of learner autonomy”

He expressed similar ideas about our learners. He said:

“They (learners) have no awareness about learner autonomy. They come from Govt. schools and colleges where they are taught with the help of grammar-translation method. So they have no preparation for the concept of learner autonomy. On the contrary, students coming from O-level and A-level have a fair degree of learner autonomy”.

Nunan (2003) has discussed the issue of awareness about the concept of learner autonomy in his five-stage model of learner autonomy. Rather awareness is the very first stage towards promotion and practice of learner autonomy.

Role of Teacher

The next code that emerged from suggestions is the role of the teacher. Autonomous learning is not teacher-less learning. Rather the role of a teacher is vital in the promotion or otherwise of learner autonomy. It is a teacher who shares his responsibilities and duties with students. So a change in the role of the teacher was suggested for the promotion of learner autonomy. This code is further divided into sub-codes. These sub-codes are:

Teacher Training

Teacher training was the most repeated issue of this interview data. Almost all the interviewees emphasized the need for proper and meaningful teacher training for the promotion of learner autonomy. According to the respondents, teacher training was neither sufficient nor effective to serve the purpose of qualitative learning. So capacity building was necessary before introducing modern concepts like learner autonomy. For instance Respondent No # 5 discussed this topic vehemently and suggested a coherent plan for teacher training. He said:

“Teacher is not well-trained. His foreign exposure is not there. We should start it right from the primary level. Primary school teachers must be trained within universities. After he has done this he should go back and implement that training there.The base is on the training of teachers. Sorry to say that most of the trainings that I’ve seen are just pass-time. Nobody is training them rightly. There should be a syllabus to be covered and at the end of the training, there should be some kind of evaluation. For instance, the best way to do this is when you have taught them for three days next he (trainee) should come and teach. If he has got something he will teach otherwise not. What we are doing right now is distributing certificates and inviting some good speakers. These good speakers come and utter their frustration. Jokes are established and nothing is done”.

Discussing the issue of implementation, respondent no # 6 said that teachers are not trained properly to handle this novel concept. He said:

“Capacity of the teacher is also a hindrance in the way of implementing principles of learner autonomy. Teachers are not trained properly. Teacher training is a serious issue that needs our attention”.

Respondent no # 12 while discussing the feasibility of learner autonomy expressed the following views:

“The most important suggestion to change the prevailing situation is teacher training. A (real) training that may change the attitude of our teachers. Secondly, teachers should be encouraged and rewarded for better performance”.

Similar views have been expressed by Aziz and Akhter (2014) who observe that in Pakistan, many training programs are conducted for teachers by different training institutes. But Gopang (2016) asserts that their standard is not up to the mark. Similarly Farah, Fauzee and Daud (2016) point towards various problems associated to these programmes. Sidiquee et.al (2021) have hinted at low quality of training staff, lack of interest on the part of teachers and inadequate infrastructure.

Teacher Autonomy

Teacher autonomy is also an important theme that emerged from this discussion. It was said that learner autonomy depended on teacher autonomy. If a teacher is not

autonomous enough how would he promote autonomy among his learners? Here opinions differed among interviewees. Some said that teacher has desired autonomy to transfer it to his learners. Others said that teacher has no autonomy in the present scenario. Most of the time, he is curriculum-bound. He has to follow a strict schedule. He has to prepare the class for the examination. So he has neither time nor motivation to practice learner autonomy in his class. Only 3 out of 20 respondents thought that teachers have desired autonomy in BS classes. For instance respondent no # 5 said that at the university level teacher has got desired autonomy. He can adopt whatever methodology he may like. I quote his exact words. He said:

“You know when you are a lecturer or a professor no one will come and say teach this way or that way. Go into the class with the sense of responsibility that I am going to the class and what change I will bring in one hour”.

The same views have been expressed by respondent no # 13 who says that in most universities, teachers have got desired autonomy. They have the space to arrange the activities in the class and utilize the time and have interactive sessions with the students. He said:

“Teacher autonomy is also necessary. In BS classes teachers are almost autonomous. There are certain institutions where teachers’ autonomy is restricted. For instance, at the Air University, sessional marks are not directly in the hands of a teacher. Sessional marks are depending on quizzes and assignments of the students. Not on their interaction in the classroom. Otherwise, in most of the universities, teachers are given course outlines but a teacher is free in the choice of learning material and learning methodology”.

But the majority of teachers argued that in present educational and examination system teacher has no autonomy and space to experiment new ideas like learner autonomy in the classroom. He has to cover his syllabus in five to six months. He has to take tests and quizzes. He has to prepare his class for the examination. Students are also interested in following examination pattern instead of increasing their language proficiency. In this scenario, teacher is bound to follow the dictates of the system. For instance respondent no# 10 said that they face certain restriction from administration. They are bound to follow strict schedule to complete the prescribed syllabus in given time. He suggests:

“Authorities should also be made aware of the importance of teacher autonomy. The teacher should have the space to utilize some of the class time for activities and task-based learning. The lecture-only strategy will not make our learners autonomous. He should be given the autonomy to select learning material and methodology so that our learners reap the benefit of learner autonomy”.

Huang (2010) has also described the role of teacher autonomy for the promotion of learner autonomy. According to him, teacher autonomy consists of willingness, capacity and freedom to take control of their teaching. Benson (2010), and Little (1995) claim that teacher autonomy has a significant impact on learner autonomy. McGrath (2000) also affirms this view.

Changes in Assessment Techniques

Other important sub-code that was repeatedly discussed was the disapproval of marks-oriented examination system. All agreed that our present examination system encourages cramming and rote learning. Learners are more concerned about marks and grades instead of learnability and creativity. Students expect from their teacher that he will teach them important portions of syllabus according to examination point of view. They are least concerned about their proficiency. Even if a teacher is interested in interactive or

task-based learning they resist and insist that examination pattern must be followed all the time. For instance respondent no # 11 says:

“Assessment techniques should be changed. Otherwise we can't get rid of cramming. As long as good marks are the only criteria to judge their ability, we can't promote autonomy”.

Similar ideas were expressed by respondent no # 12 during discussion of feasibility of implementing this concept. He said:

“group work, peer work self-assessment and change in examination pattern are some of the steps that can make our learners autonomous and enhance their language learning proficiency”.

In the similar context, respondent no # 16 also suggested that we should change this mark-oriented examination system. She said:

“Marks-oriented system is also a hindrance in the way of learner autonomy. Learners hanker after good CGPA's to secure their future. We should introduce self-assessment and formative assessment in our institutions”.

Respondent no # 19 also thought that grade-oriented assessment system was a barrier in the way of learner autonomy and also for language proficiency. He said:

“Grade-oriented system is also a barrier in the way of learner autonomy. Teacher is not free to pursue his own agenda. He has to follow dictates of administration. Sometimes even political parties and their student wings interfere in academic affairs”.

Respondent no # 19 also recorded his views against this grade-oriented assessment system. He said:

“I've been teaching BS English classes for almost ten years. I've observed that focus is on good GPA. Very few people are concerned about their proficiency. They think they will acquire proficiency later on”.

These findings are in line with Dam, 1995 and Shohamy, 1998 who emphasize the need of self-assessment as a part of learning process. They firmly believe that self-assessment is an integral part of teaching-learning activity and traditional assessment may prove detrimental to learner autonomy.

Restructuring of Curriculum and Syllabus

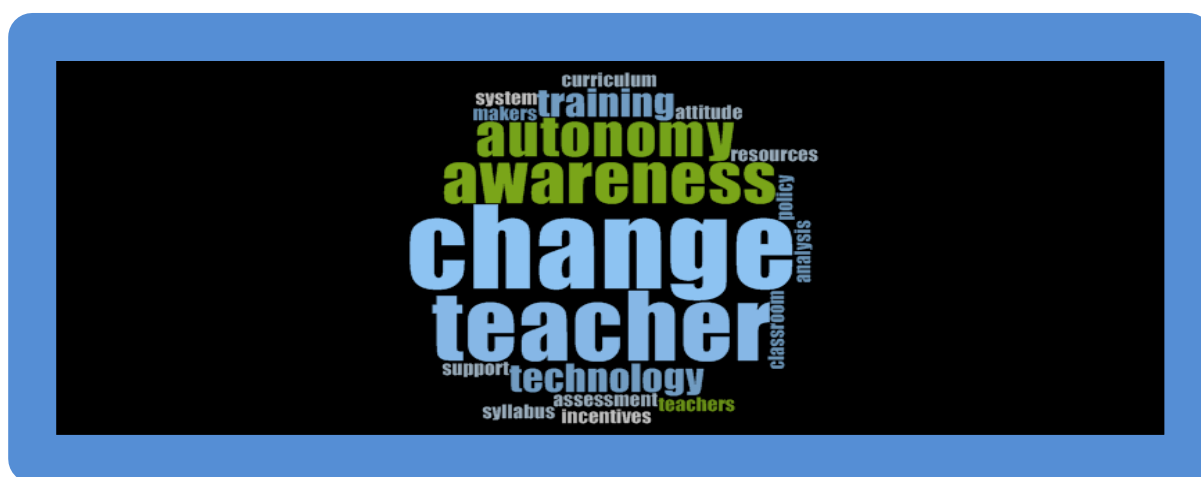
Next sub-code that we are going to discuss is restructuring our curriculum and syllabus. Principles of learner autonomy should be incorporated in our syllabus. It will create room for teachers to practice it in the classrooms. Otherwise students will insist on spoon feeding in the form of lectures and notes. When we say curriculum it involves assessment techniques also. Testing memory of the learners is not enough. They are learners not data banks. Assessment should be designed in such a way that it may evaluate skills of the learners. It should incorporate problem solving questions in it. For instance respondent no # 19 discussed this issue of syllabus in detail. He said:

“We can make our learners autonomous by modifying our teaching methodology. Teacher should give the learner chance to work in groups. He should make his class interactive. He should encourage learners to develop communicative competence. For all this, teacher needs support from policy makers. Syllabus should be designed in such a way that learners feel themselves responsible for their learning. Along with this, self-assessment techniques should be introduced”.

Respondent no # 2 also suggested same kind of change in our curriculum. He said:

“Secondly I suggest that we have to change our curriculum. If our curriculum focuses on development of language skills, it will give some space to teacher. Teacher can utilize this space to promote learner autonomy and creativity among learners. No doubt obtaining marks is an important factor in present scenario, but if there are some marks for practical performance, learners will willingly engage themselves in activity-based and task-based learning”.

These views of respondents are supported by Breen & Littlejohn (2000) who advocate for a process syllabus, negotiated with and between the students. This syllabus is more autonomy supportive as compared to traditional product syllabus set by experts without consultation of teachers and learners.



Word cloud 3

Conclusion

This study has discussed teacher's perceptions about the concept and practical aspects of learner autonomy. Results of the study show that majority of the teachers have some idea about the concept of learner autonomy. They also have a clear idea of autonomous learning behavior among their learners. All the teachers are of the opinion that learner autonomy can enhance language proficiency of BS English learners. Opinion divided on the issue of desirability among the learners and teachers to practice learner autonomy in the classrooms. From their discussion, the researcher made his opinion that students, to some extent, have the desire to become autonomous but majority of the teachers lack this desire for certain reasons. Last but not the least was the issue of feasibility. All agreed that it was feasible to promote learner autonomy but it needed certain measures to be taken. These were like teacher training, change in curriculum, changes in assessment techniques, encouragement and incentives for the teachers. Crux of the study is that teachers have the awareness that language proficiency of their learners can be increased with the help of learner autonomy.

Recommendations

The researchers, on the basis of their findings, suggest following recommendations:

- Investigate ways to integrate learner autonomy principles into the existing curriculum for BS English learners in Southern Punjab. Explore the development of

modules or specific learning activities that promote self-directed learning and linguistic independence.

- Propose the design and implementation of teacher training programs focused on equipping educators with strategies to foster learner autonomy. Assess the impact of such programs on teacher attitudes, knowledge, and teaching practices related to promoting autonomy in language learning.
- Examine alternative assessment methods that align with the principles of learner autonomy. Explore the effectiveness of formative assessments, self-assessment tools, and reflective practices in measuring language proficiency among BS English learners.
- Complement the teacher-focused perspective with insights from BS English learners. Explore students' attitudes, preferences, and challenges related to autonomous language learning. Understand how learners perceive the impact of autonomy on their language proficiency.
- Investigate the influence of cultural factors on the acceptance and effectiveness of learner autonomy initiatives. Explore how cultural norms and expectations in Southern Punjab may shape the implementation and outcomes of autonomy-promoting practices.
- Explore the role of technology in facilitating learner autonomy among BS English learners. Investigate the use of digital tools, online resources, and language learning platforms in supporting self-directed language learning practices.
- Examine the role of institutional policies and support mechanisms in facilitating or hindering the promotion of learner autonomy. Investigate how administrative decisions and institutional culture impact the integration of autonomy-promoting strategies.

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