THE AUTONOMY APPROACH
IN LANGUAGE LEARNING AND TEACHING

Ozlem Yagcioglu[i]
Full-time Instructor,
Dokuz Eylul University,
School of Foreign Languages,
Foreign Languages Department,
Izmir, Turkey

Abstract:
Teachers and professors learn many approaches from their academic books and from each other to teach foreign languages in their classes. The autonomy approach is one of the most important and necessary approaches in foreign language classes. This study deals with the autonomy approach in foreign language education. The definitions of autonomy and the autonomy approach will be given. Sample classroom activities will be shared. The role of the autonomy approach in language learning and teaching will be highlighted.

Keywords: Autonomy; Autonomy Approach; Foreign Language Learning; Foreign Language Teaching

1. Introduction

The autonomy approach in language learning and teaching means considering the approaches which the learners are interested in and which the learners would like to follow. It has different meanings and definitions in different groups. The instructors who use autonomy approach in their course hours are aware of the fact that they should help students to study with each other and to make them more active and talkative in their course hours. Their courses must be guided, but they must also prepare student centred class hours which students collaborate and communicate with each other. This approach must also help to develop students' foreign language learning skills such as reading, writing, listening and speaking.

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[i] Correspondence: email ozlemygcgl@gmail.com

2. Theoretical Background

2.1. What is Autonomy?
The word autonomy has been defined on the Merriam Webster dictionary as:
Definition of autonomy:

1) *"the quality or state of being self-governing especially: the right of self-government // the territory was granted autonomy.*
2) *self-directing freedom and especially moral independence. // personal autonomy*
3) *a self-governing state."*

(https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/autonomy)

It is defined on the Cambridge Dictionary as:

1. *the right of an organization, country, or region to be independent and govern itself: Demonstrators demanded immediate autonomy for their region. The universities want to preserve their autonomy from central government.*
2. *the ability to make your own decisions without being controlled by anyone else* (https://dictionary.cambridge.org/tr/s%C3%B6zl%C3%BCk/ingilizce/autonomy)

Smith (2008: 395) denotes that;

> *"Supportive engagement of learners' existing autonomy (by the teacher) can be seen as an important basis for its progressive development; indeed, the notion that learners have the power and right to learn for themselves is seen by many proponents as a fundamental tenet. On the other hand, learner training and other approaches which attempt to fit learners into preconceived models of the 'ideal autonomous learner' may lend support to the criticism that autonomy is a western concept inappropriate for 'non-western' students (ibid.). "*

When the above paragraph is read, it is understood that the learners' autonomy is essential for their development in language education. Training and the other approaches which are used for the learners' development help learners to become better learners.

It has been stated by Smith, Kuchah and Lamb (2017: 1) that;

> *"Learner autonomy may have special relevance now in developing countries, where a dissonance often exists between what formal education offers and what many learners want or need. Globalization and its technologies are providing new means of accessing knowledge, but school language lessons remain largely unchanged. Almost by default, successful language learners in developing country contexts are autonomous learners*

who can exploit out-of-school resources, while some of the most effective pedagogy involves promoting autonomy as a means of confronting low-resource challenges."

Here, it is understood that the learner autonomy takes an important place in developing countries. The formal education system is not prepared according to the learners' needs and requirements. Successful language learners in developing countries are the ones who develop their foreign language learning skills outside the classrooms.
Smith, Kuchah and Lamb (2017: 11) also state that;

"The concept of learner autonomy may, then, have a particular kind of relevance in the developing world, partly because there is such a dissonance between what formal education offers, or can offer, and what many learners want and actually attempt to gain for themselves. In rural parts of Indonesia, as Lamb's research has shown, globalization and its technologies are having the effect of increasing the desire for English among young people and providing novel means of accessing it, while their school English lessons remain largely unchanged, dependent on the textbooks, assessments and the professionalism of their class teacher. This kind of dissonance is probably found in most developing world contexts right now, and how it affects learners' sense of autonomy and their autonomous learning and use of English is worthy of much more study."

In this paragraph, the concept of learner autonomy in the developing world has been highlighted. Globalization and the developments in technology have always affected learners' sense of autonomy and their learning styles.

3. What is Autonomy Approach?

Morrison and Navarro (2014: 18) denote:

"Autonomy in language learning has been notoriously difficult to define and, while academics continue to disagree about the concept and refine the various definitions, teachers have interpreted it in different ways. As a result, it seems that, although there are some amazing practitioners doing inspirational work by handing control over to students, there are also many teachers who are still not quite sure what autonomy in language learning is all about. In fact, regardless of the definition used, no causal link has yet been established between learner autonomy and language development."

Four principles of the Autonomy Approach have been listed by Morrison and Navarro (2014: 18) as:
- **It is student-led:** Students decide how they will learn. They also decide what they are going to do after the class hours.
- **It is guided:** Students are guided with the help of the classroom activities and discussions. They are also guided through a systematic cycle of planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation.

- **It is focused:** Students decide what they will learn and what they will not learn. They consider their own strengths and weaknesses.
- **It is collaborative:** Students are encouraged to study with each other in their class hours. They are also encouraged to study or to practice their lessons with different people in their leisure times.

As it has been mentioned by Morrison and Navarro (2014: 19):

"The changes in language education that have been happening over the years-asking the learners to become more active participants in their learning-require a shift in both teacher and learner roles: a shift in all our perceptions and expectations, as well as in how we prepare and apply these new ways of teaching and learning.
This may seem like an obvious statement, but; a lot of the time, the types of changes that take place in classrooms and educational institutions around the world are put into action without the consent of the learners. Language learners are not always made aware of why they are being asked to reconsider how they participate in their learning and, even when attempts are made at raising awareness of why it might be a good idea to take more control, learners are rarely shown how to."

Nucamendi, Farmer and Pina (2011: 8) state that;

"As far as autonomy in language learning is concerned, there are three points to note here. Firstly, where autonomy is encouraged in an institutional setting, autonomy does not provide an excuse for teachers to abandon their dedication or professionalism. Further, autonomy is not a universal construct which takes the same form all over the world. What some individuals may see as autonomy, and what they may strive for to make them autonomous will be different to others. This will vary according to culture, but also according to many other factors from individual to individual. Finally, even teacher or tutor behaviour that seems to inhibit learner autonomy can create unexpected spaces for learner autonomy."

4. Method

4.1. Participants
The participants consisted of 30 (thirty) university students at Dokuz Eylul University in the city of Izmir in Turkey. Their ages ranged from 18-22.

4.2. Teaching Procedure
Students were asked to attend some classroom activities to improve and to develop their language skills.

A. Sample Classroom Activity 1

This is a guided classroom activity, but it is also collaborative. All the instructors who work in the School of Foreign Languages at Dokuz Eylul University teach the same subject in their classes during the same week as the coursebook is used as a school rule.

The following classroom activity is used to develop the students' vocabulary knowledge, pronunciation skills and these activities help students to study with each other.

Level: B1+

Vocabulary (Doff, Thaine, Puchta, Stranks, Lewis-Jones, 2015: 23)

- **a-** *Think of things you can do on a smart phone. Compare ideas with other students. Who has the most ideas?*
- **b-** *Match words 1-5 with definitions a-e.*
    - **1-** *app* **3-** *icon* **5-** *username*
    - **2-** *browser* **4-** *text messages*
  - a- *a name you need to type (with a password) to start using something*
  - b- *a written message that you send from one phone to another*
  - c- *a computer program that you use to read information on the internet*
  - d- *a small picture on a computer/phone screen that you click on to open a program or an app*
  - e- *a small computer program that you can download onto a mobile phone or other device*
- **c-** *Cross out the wrong verb in each group.*
    - 1- *turn off /send/ delete an email*
    - 2- *download/ press/ share a video*
    - 3- *install/ share/ upload some photos*
    - 4- *install/ download/ press a new app*
    - 5- *turn off/ turn on/ delete a phone*
    - 6- *upload/ press/ click on a button or icon*
    - 7- *connect to/ send/ browse the internet*
    - 8- *type/ change/ turn on a password*
- **d-** *Think of five things that you have done recently using phrases from 1c. Tell a partner.*
- **e-** *Discuss the questions.*
    - 1- *What applications have you got on your phone or tablet?*
    - 2- *Which applications do you like or use most?*
    - 3- *Look at the apps on this page. What do you think they do?*

B. Sample Classroom Activity 2

Students were asked to download the Word Crossy Game. Word Crossy - A crossword game is a puzzle game to find words. It belongs to Rein Technology Limited: Retrieved from:

https://itunes.apple.com/us/app/word-crossy-a-crossword-game/id1273162445?mt=8

They played Wordcrossy game for 5 or 6 minutes during the 5th and the 6th week of their academic term. The aim of this activity is to develop vocabulary knowledge and to make students study with each other.

C. Sample Classroom Activity 3
Level: B1

This is a guided classroom activity, but it is also collaborative. All the instructors who work in the School of Foreign Languages at Dokuz Eylul University teach the same subject in their classes during the same week as the coursebook is used as a school rule.

Students were asked to complete following exercise during the beginning of the class hour. The aim of this activity is to make more active participants and to check students' pronunciation skills. Students were also asked to do role play for this exercise.

Useful Language (Anderson, 2015: 12)
a. Asking for information in a public place
 Complete the conversation with the words in the box.

> *Can near here have over there could you excuse anything else actually from what time*

A: …………………….. me.
B: Yes, how ……………………….. I help you?
A: ------------------------- tell me which platform the next train to London leaves ………………………….?
B: Certainly, madam. It leaves from Platform 2.
A: OK, thanks. And ……………………. does it leave?
B: It leaves at 10.32, in twelve minutes.
A: Brilliant. Thanks.
B: Is there ……………………….. I can help you with?
A: ………………………… there is one more thing. Where can I buy a cup of coffee? Is there a cafe -------------------------- ?
B: Yes, there is. There's a cafe on the platform, -------------------
A: Great. Thanks so much.
B: No problem. ……………………………… a good journey.

4.3 Students' Feedback

Classroom activities in this study were used in two different classes at Dokuz Eylul University in Izmir in Turkey. Students in these classes at Dokuz Eylul University were from the different regions and they were from the different cities in Turkey. According to the students in these classes, classroom activities were useful and enjoyable to improve their language skills and their vocabulary knowledge in English.

4. Objectives of This Study

- To make students more active and talkative in the class hours;
- To check students' pronunciation skills;
- To help students to study with each other;

5. Conclusion

Up to here, definitions of autonomy gave been given. The concepts of the autonomy in language learning and the autonomy in language teaching have been told. The role of the autonomy approach in language learning has been handled.

For professional development in language education and for the students' progressive development, the autonomy approach in language education is important. Students get benefits from the autonomy approach and they become more fluent and happier leaners. When the autonomy approach is student-led, students become more creative and they develop their thinking and creativity abilities. When the autonomy approach is collaborative, students become more active and talkative in their class hours.

In conclusion, the autonomy approach in language education is crucial. It is hoped that this study will help all colleagues to remember the importance of autonomy approach in language education.

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