Enhancing Learner Autonomy through Reciprocal Approach to Curriculum Development

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Abstract

This study reports on how a heterogeneous mixed-ability large class (63 students) turned into a cohesive and functioning class. To promote learner autonomy, students were made responsible to identify their own needs and objectives. The participants of this study consisted of undergraduate chemistry students who had taken the English for General Purposes (EGP) course at the University of Tabriz, Iran. A learning-centered approach was opted for to fulfill both course goals (i.e. reading skill) and different students' needs, objectives, expectations, and preferences. The theoretical decisions about goals and needs were contextualized and taken to the next level, i.e. implementation stage. The students' views, syllabus, and the institution's goals were translated into practical and actual classroom activities and exercises. Useful textbooks, tasks, and projects were presented and practiced. The new syllabus acted as a mediator to raise the students' awareness to language learning, their needs, lacks, and goals. The syllabus went beyond the planning stage and content specification to the level in which the students were made to use and produce language through communicative activities within meaningful context. There were some constraints and limitations which were obviated. The important benefits of this course were as follows: selection of effective materials and methods, learner autonomy, teacher self-development, and face-value of the course.

Keywords: Learner Autonomy, Syllabus Design, Curriculum Development, Learning-centered Curriculum

1. Introduction

The English for General Purposes (EGP) course is offered each semester at the University of Tabriz, Iran and undergraduate students have to take and pass it in order to fulfill the graduation requirements. The EGP is a 3-hour-per-week course which students study only in one semester. It is obvious that during one semester students barely develop their general English. The implicit objective of the EGP course is the promotion of reading skill. However, as an instructor teaching this course for more than twelve years, it has been noticed that the EGP barely satisfies the students' immediate and future needs. The students take it to obtain pass mark and the instructors teach it to fulfill their teaching hours. Generally, there were some constraints in the context including:

- Students' high expectations of instructors and the EGP course,

- Mixed-ability and large size classes (45-65),

- Diverse goals, needs, and wishes of students,

- Teacher-fronted attitudes of most students,

- Examination-based attitudes of students to the EGP course,

- Lack of exposure to spoken language,

- Lack of confidence in communicating in English,

- Adherence to traditional learning approaches (i.e. rote learning and mimicry memorization of vocabulary items) and teaching methods,

- Dominance of the EGP course by textbooks,

- Lack of teaching aids such as video projector,

- Lack of workshops to refresh instructors,

- Lack of communication among instructors,

- Lack of the EGP syllabus.

Therefore, in order to compensate for the lack of resources and overcome the constraints, a learning-centered approach to curriculum development was adopted. In this way, it was intended to make some modifications in the EGP course, i.e. make it interesting and promote learner autonomy. Generally, the term syllabus is used by the British and the term curriculum is used by the Americans. "The curricula are concerned with making general statements about language learning, learning purpose and experience, evaluation, and the role relationships of teachers and learners …" (Nunan, 1999, p. 3). On the other hand, syllabuses are concerned with a particular plan of work, the selection of content and methods, as well as what actually happens at the classroom level. However, based on Robinson (1991, p. 33), I use the terms syllabus and curriculum interchangeably in this article. Wette (2009, p. 360) argues that there are two types of curriculum making: curriculum as plan, i.e. pre-course planning, and curriculum as process, i.e. instructional curriculum. We should consider "the inherently multifaceted and contingent nature of curriculum making as a social process, and the skill and professional knowledge needed to realize or transform a planned curriculum into an instructional curriculum as a course unfolds in time …" (ibid. 360). In so doing, I needed to take into account the developmental needs and wishes of the students and the limitations and resources of the institution.

To this end, at the outset of the EGP course, we (the students and I) discussed about the following set of steps in order to design an innovative syllabus: goals, roles, plans, activities, testing, and evaluation (Skehan, 1998, p. 263). By making some changes to the EGP course, I intended to fulfill the students' "immediate and delayed needs" (Dudley-Evans & St John 2000, p. 146). My role as a teacher was to facilitate "activities arising from learners' expressed wants" (ibid.). We selected common-core (i.e. general English materials) materials because the students were supposed to study specific materials at their ESP course. Meanwhile, we worked out the course design.

Therefore, we attempted to determine why the students want to study the EGP course. At this juncture, we took into account the potential and limitations of the learning context. We also discussed about the distribution of time among different activities because our time was limited (3 hours per week). We negotiated what aspects of language the students need to learn, as well as the topics, texts, and tasks that need to be covered. However, the pre-specified plans were reconsidered in the light of students' progress and contextual factors. Obviously, curriculum making is uncertain and at the same time dynamic in nature. To create a rich learning environment, I had to weave the linguistic content, consider students' learning strategies and styles, and be careful of socio-cultural norms and conditions. At this juncture, it was essential to achieve variety and balance among the different elements of the curriculum.

2. Learner autonomy and curriculum development

Learner autonomy might be described as the degree to which learners are free to select their own learning materials and methods, practice language as far as they need, and produce written or spoken form of language when they get ready. There are some generally accepted aspects of autonomy such as: "situations in which learners study entirely on their own, and determine the direction of their own learning" (Lynch, 2001, p. 390-1). Certainly, learner autonomy has its own levels which vary with circumstances. The optimal form of learner autonomy is in making complementary contributions which results from students and teachers' negotiation process in planning and implementing activities and exercises. Wolter (2000, p. 315) believes that "ownership is an important condition" in which the learners think of classroom and curriculum as their own. The main reason that teachers need to promote learner autonomy is that students can continue their learning without their teachers after they finish their classes (Jordan, 1997, p. 116).

Therefore, if teachers want to have independent students in their classes, they need to make their students responsible and accountable for their own learning. What teachers need is to find practical ways of contributing to learner autonomy rather than following dry and rigid curriculum theories. However, both theory and practice can complement each other. To set up a learning-centered course, Skehan (1998, p. 261) proposes two approaches to curriculum development: *cognitive* development perspectives and self-actualization (*affective*) curriculums. The first one rejects direct transmission of knowledge and advocates learner independence and development of thinking techniques, as well as the ways of language learning. The latter approach emphasizes the role of the learners and their affective process in the learning context. It emphasizes that the educational institution should facilitate a balanced process of personal growth. Both cognitive and affective approaches emphasize that students need to develop their questioning attitudes and become aware of their learning process. Nunan (1999, p. 21) argues that there are two views on language learning which have created tension among language teachers: *subject-centered*

view and *learner-centered* view. The first one stresses the acquisition of a body of knowledge by the learner. But the latter one emphasizes the process of mastering necessary skills. The proponents of the learner-centered view attempt to help learners to gain linguistic and communicative skills in order to carry out real-world tasks.

In selecting materials and methods, in learning-centered curriculum, teachers work in close collaboration with the students. The focus is on the learners and the teachers share their decisions with the learners. In so doing, the syllabus is tailor-made for the learners, adapting the syllabus based on the learners' objectives, wishes, interests, needs, and proficiency level. Therefore, the learners are provided with a range of choices of materials, activities, exercises, tasks, texts, and projects (Jordan, 1997). This type of syllabus design can be referred as *negotiated curriculum* in which the focus is on the learners and their learning processes. As the teachers provide the learners with the alternatives or options, it is the learners who make the final selection. When the learners are involved in the process of curriculum development, they will perceive the course relevant to their needs and objectives. Also, they will be sensitized to their goals, needs, preferences, weaknesses, and strengths. More importantly, they will develop an awareness of the learning process and the necessary strategies on how to approach the language learning process (Nunan, 1999).

The best syllabus type in which the learning-centered approach can be realized is the *process syllabus*. "In process syllabuses the learner is given power not only to interact, but also to control the nature of interactions which take place" (Skehan, 1998, p. 262). In this way, the learners decide what activities to be carried out and how they should be executed. Although the learners may have a vague idea of their needs and goals, they will not learn anything unless they know what they are trying to achieve. The teachers need to note that it is the learners who construct knowledge by interpreting events through their conceptions and understandings. Obviously, the learners have different goals, strategies and proficiency level, so that they learn in different ways. Therefore, "The emphasis on pair or group work and problem-solving allows for these differences" (Dudley-Evans & St John, 2000, p. 27).

It is believed that language learning is a collaborative endeavor constructed mutually between learners and teachers. However, there are times in which conflicts may arise between teachers and learners' agendas in three domains: "a) the experiential domain, b) the learning process domain, and c) the language content domain" (Bourke, 2006, p. 280). Therefore, it is necessary that teachers consider learners as experts who know their needs, goals, strengths, weaknesses, and potential problems (Wolter, 2000, p. 316-7). It is better that teachers perceive their students' wishes, interests, aspirations, and background knowledge and act accordingly. Therefore, in order to know their students, teachers can conduct interviews, do needs analysis, or give questionnaires. In this way, the learners' characteristics can be taken into account and an individualized approach to learning can be adopted.

In a learning-centered approach, the teachers are rather free to structure their classes based on the students' aims and needs. Hence, the syllabus acts as a checklist rather than a pre-specified mandatory order. If teachers want to enhance learner autonomy and promote independent learning, they need to raise their learners' awareness and train them. Therefore, the learners can perceive that there are different ways, styles, and strategies of language learning. Thus, learners become responsible for their own language learning and when their enrolled course finishes "they can continue the learning process more independently and with more self-confidence" (Jordan, 1997, p. 98). If learners are given enough time and space, as well as clear directions, they can succeed considerably. If teachers want to promote learner autonomy, they need to encourage them "to set personal goals, monitor and reflect on their performance, and modify their learning behavior accordingly" (Cotterall, 2000, p. 116). However, if a class is composed of heterogeneous group of learners, the teachers need to introduce different types of activities, exercises, and topics "that are common to various interests in the group" (Dudley-Evans & St John, 2000, p. 152). However, if the class is homogeneous, the teachers can present and practice more specific work.

Nonetheless, the important issue is that the teachers should always "give students a choice of topics to study" (Clapham, 2001, p. 84) and motivate them in positive ways. It is believed that one of the best ways of developing learner autonomy is to assign them project work. In this way, they can take responsibility for their own learning and "approach learning in their own way, suitable to their own abilities, styles, and preferences" (Skehan, 1998, 273). It is through project work that teachers can take account of learner differences. Project work is the best opportunity for the learners to prepare themselves for individualized work and test their styles and strategies to guide them. The main feature of learning-centered approach is that as the course enters the selection and implementation stage, the learners are required as experts in the field to inform the teachers on how to conduct the classes most effectively. Therefore, the learners are involved in the curriculum as providers of views and opinions, and not merely as receivers of content and methods. It is because only learners have adequate understanding of their own situation, and know how the materials and methods can function efficiently.

Therefore, there will be a reversal of roles. While, still being in control of classes, the teachers ask students to provide them with an insight into how the curriculum can be adapted to better suit their specific situations. The learners' involvement in the curriculum making process motivates them to participate in the classroom activities. The learners as authorities are trained on how to transform their views into classroom activities. "The end result is a program that shifts from being a more or less one-way transfer of information to encouraging and fostering a two-way exchange of ideas" (Wolter, 2000, p. 315). Obviously, when the learners have little experience of language learning, it is the teacher who makes most of the decisions. More importantly, a learning-centered approach can succeed only with the continuous support of administrators. The teachers who work alone can only succeed to a limited extent. The more learners and teachers who work together in developing the curriculum, the more they can succeed.

3. The study

The English for General Purposes (EGP) course is offered every semester to all the undergraduate students at the University of Tabriz, Iran. It is a 3-hour-per-week course which is only studied during one semester. The EAP courses at the University of Tabriz, like all the universities throughout Iran, consist of the EGP and ESP (English for Specific Purposes) courses. The EGP course is taught by language instructors but the ESP course is taught by subject instructors. The ESP is a 2-hour-per-week course which is also studied during one semester. However, since the focus of this study is on the EGP course, I only try to deal with it rather than the ESP course. I have taught the EGP course for more than twelve years and have perceived that it can barely meet the students' needs and objectives. Therefore, it was necessary to overcome its weaknesses and modify it as far as possible.

4. Method

Since the aim of this study was to bring about autonomous learners and make the students responsible for their own learning, I used a special type of method to obtain the necessary data. That is, as the students' discipline was chemistry and they were aware of their own language needs and objectives, I asked them to collect data based on their own perceptions of the course. Also, as I had adopted a learning-centered approach for teaching the EGP (English for General Purposes) course, I made students responsible for determining their needs and goals and accordingly select the necessary materials and classroom activities. Therefore, at the first day of our class, I asked the students to get a piece of paper and write down their present and future needs and goals of studying the English language.

Therefore, the students wrote their ideas, and then I collected them and categorized the information in the class with the close collaboration of the students. Then, based on the data, I asked the students to form groups. Therefore, the students were grouped according to common interest. For me the number of groups was not important, the overarching issue was the closeness of interests, objectives, and needs. In this way, we came up with several different interest groups. The main groups based on ascending order were as follows: students who were interested to continue their studies and do MS, students who wanted to find a job after taking their BS, the students who were undecided about their future, and finally the students who wanted to migrate to another country. In order to make the students independent and select materials based on their own needs, I introduced several different textbooks.

Then, again based on needs, objectives, and interests, I divided each group into five students. I asked the students to collect the necessary information about their present and future needs and report it in the class for their classmates. I asked the students to gather information from different sources: ex-students, students who had graduated, postgraduate students, students who had graduated and were working in factories or any other places, subject instructors, internet, and any other source that they could obtain information related to their interests. Some of the students collected the information in one week, others in two weeks, and yet some others in three weeks. Therefore, in the next session, when the students had come up with their needs and goals, I asked them to find necessary textbooks, articles, papers, internet materials in order to meet their interests and preferences. Meanwhile, I helped them to find the materials, especially reading texts, to study them. In the class, the groups shared information with each other and when they needed help, I was there to help them. This process was interesting for most of the students because they followed what they needed and where they had more problems.

4.1 Participants

The participants of this study consisted of three groups: undergraduate chemistry students (n=63), three language instructors and three subject instructors. The student participants were studying the EGP course during the time of this research. The students' age ranged from 19 to 25, with an average of 20. The language instructors held PhD in TEFL and subject instructors held PhD in the field of chemistry who taught the ESP course.

4.2 Instruments

The instruments which were used in this study consisted of informal discussions with the students and instructors, informal needs analysis, field notes, continuous observation of students, journals, and diaries.

4.3 Data Collection and Analysis

The data was collected during one semester. I tried to obtain the students' views either inside the classroom or outside it. My main purpose was to be more indirect and implicit in order to obtain natural and unbiased data. Meanwhile, the subject instructors were approached in a friendly way in order to elicit their opinions about the students and the EAP courses at the University of Tabriz. Since the obtained data were qualitative, an attempt was made to organize them, and find necessary patterns and forms. Then, the data were analyzed thematically and interpretatively, coded, and finally interpreted based on the objectives of the study.

5. Findings and discussions

5.1 Needs-based Syllabus Design

It was indeed difficult and demanding to determine different needs of 63 chemistry students. The students had various objectives, preferences, and expectations of the EGP (English for General Purposes) course. However, it was tried to elicit the students' views in the first session. That is, the students, in the first session, were asked to write down their objectives and needs. Therefore, four general and broad categories were obtained: the students (n=34) who wanted to further their studies and get MS, the students (n=13) who intended to obtain a job after graduation, the students (n=11) who were undecided, and finally, the students (n=5) who wanted to migrate to a foreign country. This categorization of students' future objectives and needs helped me and the students to think of an effective syllabus to satisfy the students as far as possible.

As Robinson (1991, p. 102) argues, "before an EAP course is set up or a textbook or coursebook written, some sort of needs analysis should be carried out." Obviously, a wise starting point for designing the EGP course was an understanding of learners' needs and wants. West (1994, p. 4) emphasizes that needs analysis is a "key instrument in course design." Needs analysis was a point of departure for the collection and application of necessary information on students in order to design the EGP syllabus, content, tasks, and activities. Moreover, needs analysis provided an array of sophisticated information to identify the strengths and weaknesses of the EGP course and thus design an appropriate syllabus. In so doing, I needed to discover the students and try to actively involve them in every decision-making in order to select the necessary materials and activities. Generally, "learners do want and appreciate the opportunity to express their views about their course and wish to exercise some degree of control over the way the course proceeds" (Davies, 2006, p. 8).

In fact, needs analysis determined the direction that the EGP course took. As a teacher, I tried to identify not only the students' target needs (Munby, 1978), but also their learning needs (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987). As I wanted to produce competent students, I tried to investigate the students' competence, performance, prior education, weaknesses, skills, learning styles and strategies, preferences, and expectations. By involving students in the needs analysis process, I intended to attend to and meet the students' interests, wishes, lacks, and wants. Meanwhile, it was necessary to carry out needs analysis in order to identify constraints and limitations of the institution and compensate for them as far as possible. It was also necessary to fulfill the demands of the university and strike a balance between the students' objectives and the university's goals. In this study, it was managed to obtain both objective and subjective information.

Obviously, the objective data provided information about the students' age, educational background, proficiency level, mother tongue, and previous learning experience. Meanwhile, the subjective data provided information about the students' goals, preferences, expectations, preferred materials and methodology, learning styles and strategies, techniques, exercise, activities, tasks, and projects. More importantly, during the syllabus design, I carried out means analysis. The most important weakness which we suffered from was the lack of video projector in our EGP class. Meanwhile, the 3-hour-per-week time was also very short and we barely could present materials, practice content, and require students to produce language. Sometimes, in selecting materials and methods, we (the students and I) experienced some conflicts. However, we tried to eliminate the mismatches through negotiation and discussion. It should be noted that needs analysis was not the only means of designing the EGP syllabus. There were many other aspects of curriculum which needed to be taken into account if we wanted to design a robust course. Sometimes, "teachers may rely more often on intuition when making course planning decisions than on informed assessment of learners' needs" (Davies, 2006, p. 3).

The results of the study indicate that the first group of students' (those who wanted to enter the MS program) main needs were to develop their reading and test-taking skills. That is, in Iran in order to enter the BA, MA, or PhD, students have to take University Entrance Examination. One of the components of the University Entrance

Examination is English language. Therefore, the students have to take this test and prove their proficiency in English language. Meanwhile, the first group of students needed to enrich their vocabulary and grammar ability in order to take the University Entrance Examination.

The second group of students' (those who intended to find employment after graduation) main needs involved enriching their reading and writing skills. It was because the employees in different workplaces or marketplaces were required to read different specific texts. Also, they needed to develop their writing skill because the employees needed to write lab reports, summaries, e-mail, etc. Therefore, in order to enrich their writing and reading skills, these students also needed to upgrade their vocabulary and grammar abilities too. The third group of students who were unsure about their future needs, only needed to obtain a moderate grasp of all the four language skills. Therefore, they needed to enhance both their four language skills and the components of the language: vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation. Finally, the fourth group who intended to migrate to another country stated that their main needs were enriching their listening and speaking skills. It was important to them to develop their communicative competence in order to interact with foreign people. This group of students also needed to work on vocabulary and grammar too.

5.2 Textbook Selection and Implementation

Since the objective of the EGP course was the promotion of the reading skill, I asked the students to study a reading textbook developed by myself (*Reading English in Action*). In order to address the students' needs and objectives and make them independent researchers in their own field, I introduced several different books for them to study at home and discuss them at the classroom. As it was noted earlier, there were four common interest groups. Therefore, for each group one or two different books were introduced to study as homework. For the first group (those who intended to take MS exam) one TOEFL and one IELTS book was introduced. For the second group (those who wanted to hunt a job) one reading book (*Mosaic 1: Reading*) and one writing book (*Paragraph Development*) were introduced to study. For the third group (who were undecided) a general English book (*Active Reading Comprehension*) was introduced to study at home. Finally, for the fourth group (those who wanted to go to an English-speaking country) a conversation book (*New Headway: Intermediate*) was introduced. Thus, it was tried to meet both the EGP course's goal of reading and satisfy different students with different tastes.

The most basic issue in the process of the EGP syllabus design was the question of the course content. "Given that a course has to be developed to address a specific set of needs and to cover a given set of objectives, what will the content of the course look like?" (Richards, 2007, p. 147-8). It was believed that there was no single source from which I could obtain linguistic and communicative input. It was clear that the EGP students needed both grammatical and functional knowledge to learn language. Language learning requires mastery of structural, functional, and discoursal knowledge. The reason that it was a little challenging to select only one textbook for all the students was that the students' needs and objectives were varied. Obviously, language skills and components vary from one situation to another.

Therefore, it was necessary to carry out needs analysis in order to identify the situations in which the students were supposed to use language. My main concern was the suitability of content. The students were heterogonous rather than homogeneous in terms of objectives, needs, wishes, and proficiency level. Some of the students had already attended private language institutes and their language level was proportionately high. Therefore, the homework textbooks that I asked them to study were very useful to maintain their interest and arouse their motivation for the EGP course. However, there were some other students who were weak and lagged far behind their classmates. Therefore, the common general textbook (*Reading English in Action*) was very helpful for them to develop their common core knowledge.

It should be noted that the status of English language in Iran is EFL (English as Foreign Language). For this reason, the major inclination of most students and institutions is the written form rather than oral language. To this end, at the high school and university level the emphasis is on accuracy rather than fluency. Most of the syllabuses at the secondary and tertiary levels are built around "text-based" approaches (Flowerdew, 2005, p. 137). In these syllabuses, the pedagogy is geared towards students' needs which are mostly reading and grammatical accuracy. In selecting useful textbooks and in developing my own books, the main factors that were taken into account were coverage, simplicity, utility, and socio-cultural norms.

Meanwhile, in order to promote learner autonomy, some learner traits were considered: motivation, confidence, attitude, aptitude, learning pace, background knowledge, and linguistic and communicative competence. More importantly, we (the students and I) reached an agreement on what material to practice early in the course and what to carry out later. At first, our decisions were subjective, but later as the course progressed, we modified our pace in the light of experience that we obtained from material use and classroom activities. Furthermore, the feedback gained from the students was the main source for determining texts and tasks. Also, each week, I consulted my notes

in order to provide the students with relevant and exciting activities. Meanwhile, I tried to approach several language and instructors to obtain their views on the textbooks that we used. It was because these instructors had already taught this course and had wide experience on it.

Moreover, in order to provide ample opportunities and a stress-free environment for the students, I asked some of the students to teach some of the units. This work motivated the students to participate in the classroom activities and ensured them of their control over the classroom pace. In order to make the course more learning-centered, I always asked the students what they would like to include or exclude from the syllabus. More importantly, in order to keep myself updated, I used to study scholarly papers, articles, and books in the field of general English and language teaching. The continuous reading helped me to devise new activities for the EGP class each week. "New or revised teaching materials can be an invaluable support to teachers attempting to change their teaching practice or procedure" (Lamie, 2004, p. 126). Also, the textbooks which were studied by the students as homework were very useful and consequently determined the direction of the course.

Generally, my main priority in the classroom was to practice communicative activities to push students to learn language naturally and meaningfully. Most of the time, the topics for communication came about as a result of students' free use of language in the class. Every attempt was made to provide students with opportunities to use and produce language in order to activate their potent and existing linguistic knowledge. The textbooks enabled students to analyze language, i.e. chunk language into smaller pieces and then synthesize them. Obviously, there should always be focus both on form and meaning. Without form students would not be able to put language together.

It was through tasks that students were able to use and practice language. The tasks were chosen by the students, picked from the textbooks, or selected by myself. Since the class time was very limited (3 hours per week), I tried to make the students to work and study at home and discuss their works in the class. This strategy was mainly realized through assigning tasks and projects. These activities "created in learners a level of interest, involvement, and investment …" (Davies, 2006, p. 9). By using a range of tasks, the students' proficiency level developed tremendously. However, sometimes, there were mismatches between me and some of the students over the content and tasks. Some students reacted negatively to communicative teaching-learning processes, because they had only experienced traditional approaches at high school. Nevertheless, by the passage of time, they noticed that studying grammar was only one side of the coin and the other side was to put the grammar into use.

6. Conclusion and Implications

The results of the study indicated that there were heterogeneous group of students in the EGP class. Although their field of study was the same (i.e. chemistry), they had different needs, objectives, wishes, and expectations. These differences of tastes needed to be addressed in one way or another. Therefore, I decided to make the students responsible for their own learning. Since the class size was too large (63 students), I tried to divide the students into smaller groups based on their interests and preferences. This helped to design the syllabus according to students' needs and aims and select the materials and classroom activities accordingly. In this way, we (the students and I) attempted to promote a learning-centered curriculum in which the learners were made aware of their own language learning. This process helped to enhance learner autonomy.

Each group was asked to choose their preferred tasks and projects and practice language both inside and outside the classroom. Each week we studied the common general textbook (*Reading English in Action*) to satisfy the EGP course's goal of reading. Also, the students were divided into common interest groups to discuss and work on the textbooks that related to their future needs. My role in the class was only to encourage the students and answer their questions and help to solve their problems. I rarely tried to teach them anything because they had already experienced a lot of teacher-fronted teaching at high school. "The aim of the course should not be to instill knowledge, but to encourage reflection and contemplation, and raise awareness in the participants. Raising awareness is an important issue" (Lamie, 2004, p. 132). Learning-centered curriculum needs to be a continuous process, if it pauses at any time, it will be fossilized.

Therefore, the students and I tried to share responsibility and create a learner-friendly and stress-free atmosphere to promote learner autonomy. My sole aim was to make the students aware of why they were studying the English language and make them notice their lacks and thus try to fix them. The syllabus that was designed acted as a guideline and road map rather than as a pre-specified divine rule. The designed syllabus was an approximate statement of what we would teach and learn. A fixed and dictated syllabus cannot address "factors that are so crucial to learning: emotions, personalities, subjective views, and motivation" (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987, p. 84-5). However, it was tried that the syllabus to take account of students' differences and fulfill their expectations. Our learning-centered curriculum's main concern was related to the following "three outcomes for learning: the input provided for learning, the practice opportunities that emerge, and the effects of all that happens on the receptivity of the learners" (Allwright & Bailey, 1991, p. 149).

Obviously, language learning is a complex process and cannot be learnt in one semester. Therefore, an ideal course should bring about autonomous learners who could take responsibility for their own learning. The EGP syllabus provided a practical basis for the fulfillment of the students' needs and objectives through the use of appropriate and pertinent textbooks and tasks. Moreover, the EGP syllabus attempted to give moral support to the students by providing manageable learning conditions. The students could actually perceive that their investment of time was worthwhile. The students conceived of the EGP syllabus "as a statement of projected routes" (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987, p. 83-4) which directed them where to go and how they could possibly get to their destination. Our learning-centered curriculum provided criteria for content selection, sequencing, and gradation. It provided a platform to consider the necessary linguistic items and to focus on form during communicative activities.

It is hoped that this study to be useful to the language teachers, syllabus designers, curriculum developers, researchers in the field, and course or program experts/investigators.

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