Teachers Perceptions about Developing English Language Learner Autonomy

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Abstract

Developing learner autonomy (LA) has been the teachers' focus in addressing the problems of second language pedagogy (Oxford 2003; Benson 2007; Little 1995) for a long time. The research, however, shows that the traditional pedagogical culture does not favor this idea, especially in the Asian context (Borg and Al-Busaidi 2012). The teachers' beliefs, moreover, may affect their classroom practices for the development of English language learner autonomy. In keeping with this view, we have gathered the data from 64 university teachers of Pakistan through a survey-based questionnaire to find out if teachers' positive beliefs about learner autonomy result in the rejection of teacher-centered authoritarian classroom practices

or if the teachers give attention to those teaching practices that help in the development of learner autonomy, although this study cannot ascertain if learner autonomy is linked to the development of English language skills.

Keywords: English Language Teaching, Learner Autonomy, Teachers' Perceptions, Instruction Paradigm, Learning Paradigm

1. Introduction

Allowing students to take an active part in decision making, at the tertiary level is a strategy desirable to be adopted by teachers. However, in some cases, it does not seem applicable, and the teacher dominates the advanced level students the same way as they do at the elementary (beginner) level. As a result, a student lacks autonomy, self-confidence, and power of decision making in the future, that is, in fact, the purpose of English language classes because they are meant to make learners skillful in the use of language for future higher education or job pursuits. Therefore, the research on language pedagogy stresses the importance of developing learner autonomy (Smith 2008; Benson 2001; Benson 2011; Benson 2016; Dang 2010; Alonazi 2017). Research on learner autonomy views it as a learner's willing efforts for learning (Littlewood 1996), their decision-making abilities (Wenden 1991), their desire to take responsibility for learning (Little 1995); and also their skill to evaluate the learning process and progress. The research also shows that the teachers hold positive beliefs about developing learner autonomy; however, they are less optimistic about the feasibility of promoting the same through classroom practices (Borg and Al-Busaidi 2012). Therefore, we hypothesize teachers' positive beliefs about the development of learner autonomy do not indicate that they get the opportunities to develop learner autonomy in the classrooms.

Teachers' beliefs and learner autonomy developing strategies may help learners transcend the barriers posed by traditional practices of language learning. However, when these positive beliefs do not find a place in classroom practices, the same stereotypical classroom practices become an overriding challenge and a hindrance to the emancipation of learners in the language learning context. In light of this, two questions arise: how do teachers view learner autonomy? And what do teachers do to promote learner autonomy? The previous research noted language teachers' growing interest in developing L2 learner autonomy (Oxford 2003; Benson 2007; Little 1995).

In Pakistan, like many other countries of the world, proficiency in English may help in availing better employment opportunities, improved social status, power and elitism (Rehman

2009). Moreover, it is not linked only to the global utilitarian attitude towards the English language, but it is also relevant as a linguistic capital (Sidhwa 1996). We argue that this social awareness fosters English language teachers' beliefs positively and compels them to adopt better strategies and pedagogical practices for developing English language skills. Foregrounding this, we have focused on higher education in Pakistan, where English language courses are an integral part of the curriculum across disciplines. And the role of the teachers is significant because teachers' beliefs influence their pedagogical practices. Their positive perceptions about learner autonomy put them in a position to help language learners "accept equal responsibility" for learning and be ready to "undertake organizationally (hence also discourse) initiatives" (Little 1995, p. 178). We agree that the role of the teachers is not only of an informant in the tertiary level English language lecture rooms; they may be facilitators (Voller 1997; Benson 2001; Benson 2007); managers and directors who help learners in developing autonomous learning strategies. Nunan (2003) identifies the importance of providing learners with "opportunities to make significant choices and decisions about their learning" (p.290) that would make learners work confidently with and without teachers' assistance in and outside the classroom. The research shows that teachers do not make language pedagogy mechanical with knowledge transferal alone; instead, their teaching practices encourage learners to learn (Godwin-Jones 2011). We also reject the traditional approach where learners and learning processes are teacher dependent, and a *pin drop silenced* classroom is a symbol of teaching excellence. Here, we put in Lacey's (2007) view, which emphasizes that teachers can choose to relinquish control and share it with the learners without compromising the quality of teaching. The idea that autonomous learning may replace language instructors from the classroom is frightening; nevertheless, it is an exaggerated perception (Benson 2010).

1.1. Learner autonomy in English language classrooms

Learner autonomy means the ability of the students "to take charge of their learning", (Holec, 1981, mentioned on Page, 3, introduction). Autonomy is considered as developing a sense of independent learning in the context of foreign language learning. That is why English language learning classes need to promote learner autonomy in the students. Several researchers have done a lot of work in this regard and still are exploring the discipline. Some of the studies that are of a lot of importance for the present study include the following.

Starting with Gholami (2016), who has explored the area of **"**Self-Assessment and Learner Autonomy". For Gholami autonomy is an essential part of language learning and "the most

successful learners are the ones who take the responsibility of their own learning" (p.46). Thus, reflecting upon the importance of learner autonomy, throughout his study, Gholami "calls for implementing some techniques into the curriculum to enhance this feeling of responsibility in the process of language learning" (p.47). Ultimately, the techniques he uses are self and peer assessment and their influence on learner autonomy.

However, Holec (1981) described LA as "the ability to take charge of one's learning" and this "grows out of the individual learner's acceptance of responsibility for his or her own learning." If we look at Holec, responsibility becomes the first step, after which one can think of assessment, either self or peer. So, a view on literature creates a space for the present researcher to explore the presence of this responsibility, (autonomy), in its first place, after which all other aspects of learner autonomy would be applicable. "Interestingly self-assessment didn't develop learner's language proficiency" (Gholami, 2016, p.49). The findings are in contrast to those of Khonbi and Sadeghi (2012) who claimed positive effects of self-, peer-, and teacher- assessment on Iranian undergraduate EFL students' course achievement.

Although Gholami's findings are important as they negate the previous studies establishing a different notion, again there is a need to know, how to know whether the learners are autonomous or not, which again leads towards a space for the present researchers. Ciftci (2011), in her study, "Supporting Self-efficacy and Learner Autonomy in Relation to Academic Success in EFL Classrooms (A Case Study)", tries to explore, "Self-efficacy and Learner Autonomy in Relation to Academic Success". The findings of her study show that students participating in a classroom at universities where they are given more opportunities to become autonomous are more likely to perform better in learning a language. She concludes that learner autonomy plays a significant role in academic success in the field of language learning.

Similarly, Ciftci (2011) has explored the effects of autonomy on language learning. It is not mentioned if the learners are autonomous in the first place. The effects become of secondary significance, and there will be no effects if there is no autonomy. That is why the present study is constructed to find out to what extent learners are autonomous. Elizondo (2013), in her study, "A Closer Look into Learner Autonomy in the EFL Classroom", explores "the role of learner autonomy in the academic achievement and linguistic performance of EFL students" (p.331). Her study covers a very limited scope as it includes only six students of the English Teaching Major at Universidad Nacional, Brunca Extension. Four of these informants have failed in at least one course in contrast with two students who have never failed.

The focus of her study was on, "Memory strategies, Cognitive strategies, Compensation strategies, Metacognitive strategies Affective strategies, Social strategies" (p.334). The

students did not show positive attitudes toward learning or any of the strategies. This shows a lack of deductive instruction on learner empowerment and reflection in the program. Shanarffam and Saeedi (2013), in their study, "The Relationship among EFL Learners' Autonomy, First Language Essay Writing Tasks and Second Language Essay Writing Tasks in Task/Content-Based Language Instruction", also try to explore autonomy but in terms of essay writings. Apart from essay writing autonomy can be tested in many other situations as is said by Voller (1997, p. 2)**:**

1) for situations in which learners study entirely on their own;

2) for a set of skills which can be learned and applied in self-directed learning;

3) for an inborn capacity which is suppressed by institutional education;

4) for the exercise of learners' responsibility for their learning;

5) for the right of learners to determine the direction of their learning.

However, all of these skills are not the focus of this study. The study considers the importance of learner autonomy, in language learning context, which according to Little (2000) is based on three pedagogical principles:

1. Learner involvement: Engaging learners to share responsibility for the learning process (the affective dimension)

2. Learner reflection: Helping learners to think critically when they plan, monitor and evaluate their learning (the met cognitive dimension)

3. Appropriate target language use**:** Autonomy in language learning and autonomy in language use are two sides of the same coin (the communicative dimension)

Therefore, this study explores English language teachers' teaching practices to evaluate the impact of their pedagogical beliefs. The present study postulates that English language university teachers may positively contribute to the development of LA. This study further reviews literature on the role of teachers to find whether the research shows teachers' positive beliefs about learner autonomy that might lead to positive classroom practices for developing learner autonomy. The following critical appraisal of relevant studies helps explore the field from the perspective of the role of teachers in the development of learner autonomy in English language classrooms.

1.2. Teacher's role in the development of learner autonomy

According to Benson (2007a) in the classroom teachers identify students' active participation in learning activities as learner autonomy. However, others view LA at the conceptual level as a very 'complicated' (Little, 2003) or 'multi-faceted' construct (Smith & Ushioda, 2009). However, complicated or multi-faceted LA is getting momentum in language pedagogy. Therefore, we focus globally on the growing interest of the language teachers in autonomy in language teaching and learning. And we interpolate this interest with that of the tertiary level English language teachers of Pakistan. For in the case of English language teaching at the tertiary level the whole point of developing learner autonomy is to enable learners to be efficient in English language skills to grant the teachers professional empowerment and learners the English language learning empowerment. Associated with language learning autonomy, Little (1995) notes "two distinct dimensions, one pedagogical and the other communicative" (p. 176) and we propose in our study that both these dimensions are facilitative for tertiary level English language learners. Little (1995) describes:

"There is a sense in which pedagogical autonomy clearly precedes
communicative autonomy: we may successfully practice pedagogical
autonomy from the first language lesson onwards, but it will be some time
before our learners can venture forth as autonomous language users in the
target language community. We must be careful, however, not to allow this
obvious fact to mislead us into erecting false barriers between language
learning and language use." (Little, 1995, p.176)

Little's (1995) idea of pedagogical and communicative autonomy enables us to associate the aspect of pedagogical and communicative ability with the teachers teaching and learners learning by following the paradigm of liberating educational practices, and installing it in the classroom. Such autonomy provides English language teachers the confidence in pedagogical practices; and in learners a communicative confidence. Little (1995) identifies that "this confidence to use the target language in a personally appropriate way is a necessary precondition for, but also the outcome of, the kind of communicative activity that gradually but ineluctably promotes second language development" (p. 176). According to our observation, it is the single most important reason why English language tertiary level teachers attempt to develop LA. Teachers' beliefs and pedagogical practices have a fundamental role in the development of learner autonomy; therefore, it remained the subject of many studies (e.g.,

Lamb 2008; Çakıcı 2015; Benson 2001; Little 1995). Little (2000) believed "that all truly effective learning entails the growth of autonomy in the learner" and "for most learners, the growth of autonomy requires the stimulus, insight, and guidance of a good teacher" (p.4). We propound that shifting the attention to learning doesn't imply that the teacher becomes insignificant in the formal education system. We argue, rather, that the teacher who believes in learner autonomy puts in extra effort to engage in pedagogical practices related to the development of learner autonomy. Although teachers' role in the development of learner autonomy has received a lot of attention recently (Çakıcı 2015; Benson 2001), there is a scarcity of research investigating English language teachers' beliefs and their effects on pedagogy in the second language context of the eastern world. Here, we agree with the research explicating the inapplicability of the development of learner autonomy in a non-western context (Sonaiya 2002) where the efforts are required to counterpoise the active Western student and the passive non-Western 'Other' (Holliday 2003; Holliday 2005). The research describes the role of the teacher in the development of learner autonomy in varied contexts (e.g., Little 1995, Little 1997; Voller 1997; Nunan 2003), and the researchers agree with Benson (2007a), who argued that autonomy is "somewhat vaguely formulated and inadequately motivated in both theoretical and empirical terms" (p.25). Therefore, we focus on autonomy in language learning and presume that the roles of both: teachers and learners depend on the teachers' beliefs and perceptions about the development of learner autonomy.

Voller (1997) finds that some teachers transmit knowledge to learners and then evaluate and correct the performance of learners to ensure learning; while others help learners interpret knowledge themselves; others engage learners in a dialogue to reorganize presented knowledge. Voller (1997) also classifies the role of the teacher as a facilitator, a counselor and as a resource. However, the researchers argue that the role of the teacher is beyond these definitions, it starts with their belief in the emancipation of learners and is reflected in the way they interact with the learners and deliver the content of teaching.

Borg and Al-Busaidi (2012) studied the English language teachers' perceptions and reported practices about LA at Sultan Qaboos University in Oman. Their research on teachers' beliefs and practices is linked to research and professional development. They developed a questionnaire to gather quantitative and qualitative data followed by a five-day teachers' training workshop. They recommended that analysis of the development of LA requires to be based on a study of classroom practices too. Taking Borg and Al-Busaidi (2012) to point out that "little is actually known about what learner autonomy means to language teachers" (p.3), we planned this study. Moreover, we interpolate the concept that the teachers' positive beliefs

help them to practice methods and techniques for facilitating learner autonomy. This concept provides a direction to study teachers' pedagogical beliefs, perceptions, and reflections on classroom practices critically.

1.3. Research questions

We conducted this survey-based to achieve the set objectives of exploring the role of the teachers in the development of learner autonomy. This study aims to analyze the effects of English language teachers' pedagogical beliefs on practices, therefore, the questions posed the query of

1. What are the English language tertiary level teachers' beliefs about learner autonomy?

2. How do English language teachers help learners develop autonomy through their teaching-learning practices in the classroom?

2. Research Methodology

We have administered a carefully structured questionnaire drawing upon themes drawn from the literature on L2 teachers' beliefs and practices regarding the concept of learner autonomy (especially from Borg and Al-Busaidi 2012; Voller 1997; Benson 2001; Benson 2007; Irshad, 2016). The questionnaire was piloted before the actual research phase. We distributed this survey to ten peers who filled out the survey and commented on its structure. On their suggestions, we revised some statements to remove ambiguity and to bring clarity. After careful revisions, the survey was administered and we found acceptable reliability (alpha=0.72). The sample for the study was drawn from the universities in Islamabad and Rawalpindi. A total of 123 questionnaires were distributed out of which only 64 were returned.

2.1. Context of the study

The faculty or teachers of English teaching in HEIs of Islamabad and Rawalpindi form the population. The invitation to fill in the questionnaire was sent to all conveniently approached teachers of English serving in the HEIs of Rawalpindi and Islamabad. The sampled HEIs were International Islamic University Islamabad, National University of Modern Languages Islamabad, Allama Iqbal Open University Islamabad, Fatima Jinnah Women University Rawalpindi, Air University Islamabad, Foundation University Islamabad, COMSATS Islamabad, and FAST Islamabad.

3. Results

3.1. Data analysis

English language teachers from the institutions of higher education in Islamabad/Rawalpindi responded to the questionnaire. The data was analyzed using descriptive tools of the web-based survey tool: *Surveyface*. The first section of this three-sectioned survey informs demographic details including teachers' experience of teaching English, and their educational qualifications and it also elicited teachers' perception of learner autonomy. The second section of the survey looks at the teachers' pedagogical beliefs regarding LA. The third section aims to investigate the role of English language teachers in the development of learner autonomy.

Ten (10) respondents were male English language teachers and 54 were female teachers. Although gender is not one of the variables of this study, a question arises whether this gender imbalance in the gathered data is a source of biased survey results or if it is an extraneous factor that may lead to a partial report. The answer to this question is not clear cut. Moreover, an informal survey and our observation of English departments of HEIs revealed that female teachers are serving in the majority in these departments of sampled universities.

As summarized in Figure 1, collectively the respondents represented a group with rich teaching experience and had a sound educational qualification (Figure 2). These investigations and findings established the point that the participants were experienced teachers and most of them were highly qualified.
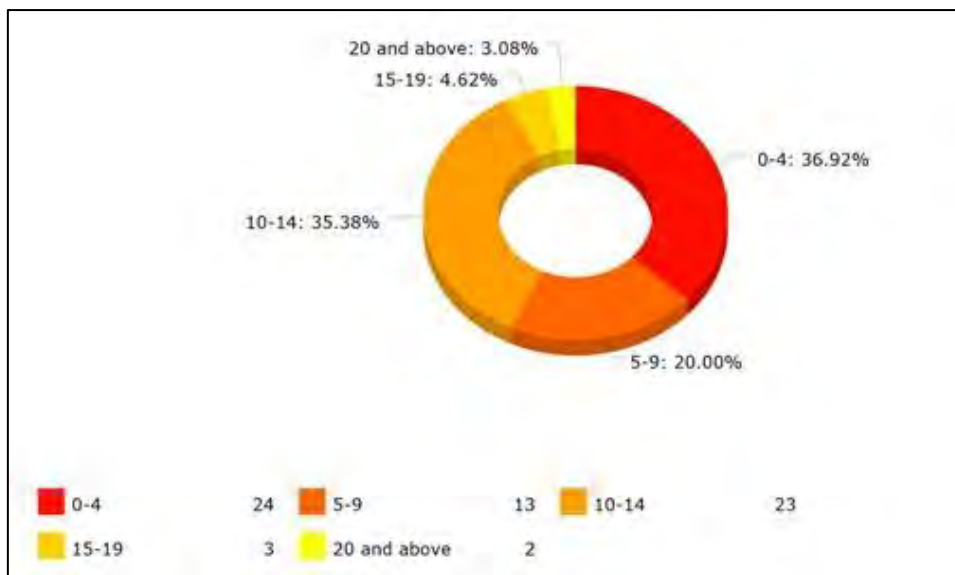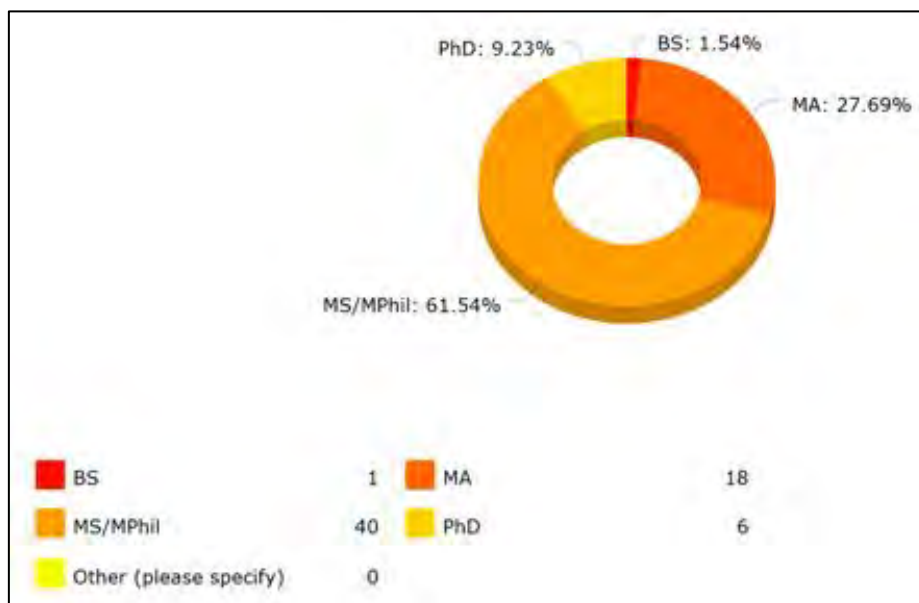
Figure 1: Teaching Experience

Figure 2: Educational Qualifications of Teachers
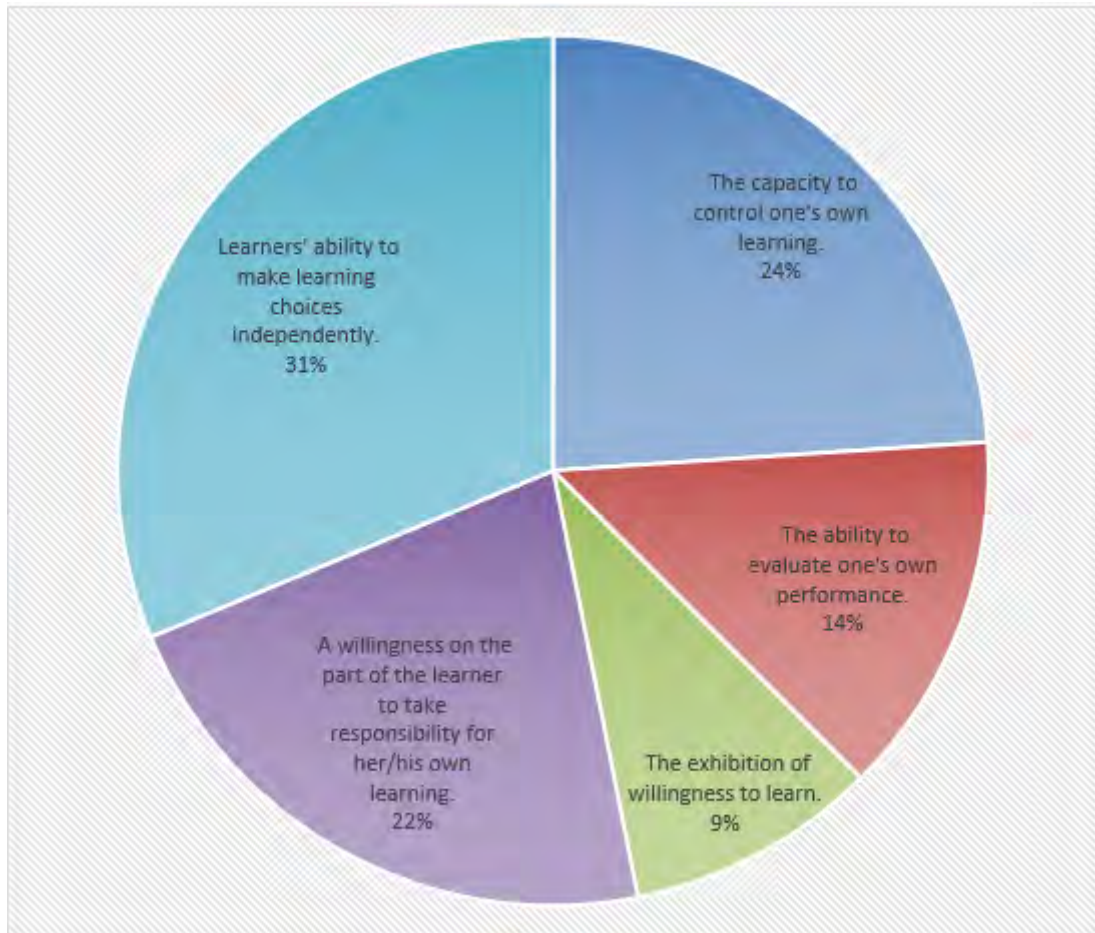
Figure 3: What is Learner Autonomy?

Figure 4: Respondents' Definition of Learner Autonomy

To gather respondents' understanding of the concept of learner autonomy questionnaire included a list of authored definitions (Figure 3). Most of the respondents believed LA as "Learners' ability to make learning choices independently" and 24% of respondents considered LA as a capacity to control one's learning.

Only 32 respondents responded to this question and defined learner autonomy. Figure 4 shows the results of the content analysis of the responses based on the frequency of occurrence of a word. Here larger font size of "learning", and "learners" exhibited the focus of definition; while "taking charge", "ability" and "control" elucidated constructs of learner autonomy.

In the introduction to this report, we have discussed that the rapidly expanding literature on learner autonomy debates whether LA is a learner's capacity or a nurtured behavior, with this in focus, we have laid statements 1-4 of the questionnaire. Table 1 summarizes the explored teachers' beliefs on learner autonomy on Likert-type five-point questionnaires (ranging from strongly disagree to agree). An average of 80% of respondents replied to this part of the survey. Most of the respondents believed in learner autonomy as: "taking control of learning", "the skill to evaluate one's learning", "willingness to learn" and "learners' ability to monitor learning" (statements 1-4, Table 1). Teachers also agreed that motivation is an important factor to develop LA (statement 5, Table 1).

Table 1: *Teachers' Beliefs and Development of Learner Autonomy*

No.	Statements	SD	Disagree	Not sure	Agree	S A
1	The capacity to take control of one's learning develops learner autonomy.	0%	6%	6%	67%	21%
2	The skill to evaluate what one has acquired helps to develop learner autonomy.	0%	6%	12%	65%	17%
3	The ability to monitor one's learning is central to development of learner autonomy.	0%	4%	8%	67%	22%
4	The willingness to learn indicates learner autonomy.	0%	14%	20%	51%	16%

5	Motivated language learners are more likely to develop learner autonomy.	0%	10%	2%	64%	25%
6	Learner autonomy can only be developed in a student-centered classroom.	2%	31%	4%	44%	19%
7	Learner autonomy means traditional teacher-led ways of teaching must be abandoned.	0%	35%	21%	31%	14%
8	Learners develop autonomy when they are allowed to work independently.	0%	10%	8%	70%	12%
9	Learners cannot develop autonomy without teacher's help.	0%	15%	14%	64%	8%
10	Learner autonomy is promoted through regular opportunities for learners to complete tasks alone.	2%	17%	15%	55%	11%
11	Learner autonomy requires the learner to be totally independent of the teacher.	2%	60%	17%	19%	2%
12	Learning to work alone is central to the development of learner autonomy.	4%	37%	15%	40%	4%
13	If learners decide about what to learn they become autonomous learners.	2%	43%	22%	28%	6%
14	Learner autonomy is developed when learners make decisions for how to learn.	0%	17%	17%	60%	6%
15	Learner autonomy is promoted when learners have some choice in the kinds of activities they do.	0%	14%	12%	64%	12%

However, the respondents' views were divided on student-centeredness in pedagogical practices. For statement 6, about 31% of respondents disagreed and 44% respondents agreed and 19% strongly agreed that the student-centered classroom helps develop learner autonomy. Similarly, 34% of teachers were not in favor of abandoning teacher-led ways of teaching. Nevertheless, most of the respondents favoured learners' independence in doing tasks

(statements 8-10 in Table 1). But when the teachers were asked to consider the learner's total independence for the development of LA about 60% of teachers disagreed (statement 11 in Table 1). Similarly, 37% of teachers disagreed with "Learning to work alone is central to the development of learner autonomy". And 43% of respondents disagreed with statement 13 "If learners decide about what to learn they become autonomous learners". However, it is noted that teachers favored learners' role in making learning decisions (statements 14 & 15 in Table 1).

To sum up the results of this section of the survey, we can say that the majority of the respondent-teachers believed in granting learning autonomy to their learners. The question arises whether it is reflected in their pedagogical practices or not. For this purpose, we asked their responses on their teaching practices on a set of fifteen statements on a five-point frequency scale (Table 2). Most of the respondents do not involve learners in deciding course objectives (statement 1, Table 2). However, 32% of respondents sometimes and 24% of respondents often take students on board while deciding on teaching materials and use of A/V aids (statement 2, Table 2). Similarly, respondents agreed to involve learners in deciding about kinds of learning tasks and activities. 36% of respondents sometimes, and 44% often involve learners in such decisions. Moreover, most of the respondents claimed that they used to involve learners in decisions about the teaching methods used in the classroom (statement 6, Table 2). The analysis of the response to statement 4 indicated HEIs English language teachers some serious efforts for the autonomy of their learners as 38% of respondents "often" and 10% "always give" a chance to the learners to decide the topics for class discussion and learning. The learners are not autonomous in making decisions on seating arrangements in the classroom (statement 7, Table 2).

Table 2: *Teaching Practices and Development of Learner Autonomy*

No.	Statement	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always
1	I involve the learners to decide the objectives of the course.	12%	42%	30%	16%	0%
2	I involve the learners to decide the materials used.	16%	26%	32%	24%	2%
3	I involve learners in decisions about the kinds of tasks and activities they do.	0%	16%	36%	44%	4%

4	I give the chance to the learners to decide the topics for class discussion/learning.	0%	24%	28%	38%	10%
5	I involve learners in self-assessment on classroom learning.	2%	2%	35%	53%	8%
6	I involve learners in decisions about the teaching methods used in the classroom.	6%	20%	44%	20%	8%
7	My learners make decisions about classroom seating arrangement.	6%	22%	32%	24%	16%
8	My learners make decisions about the use of A/V aids in the classroom.	6%	30%	44%	14%	6%
9	I encourage learners to identify their own needs.	2%	8%	20%	46%	24%
10	I motivate my learners to identify their strengths and weaknesses.	0%	4%	14%	53%	29%
11	I guide students how to monitor their progress.	2%	8%	12%	50%	28%
12	I provide opportunities to learners for self-evaluation.	0%	10%	24%	46%	20%
13	I provide opportunities for peer-learning.	0%	4%	18%	58%	20%
14	My classroom strategies provide ample opportunities to learners to learn independently.	0%	6%	22%	53%	18%
15	I motivate students to explore learning opportunities independently outside the classroom.	0%	8%	22%	42%	28%

46% of respondents often and 24% always encourage learners to identify their learning needs (statement 9). The analysis also indicated teachers' involvement in motivating learners to identify their strengths and weaknesses (statement 10, Table 2). 42% of teachers often and 24% always motivate learners to explore learning opportunities beyond restricted classroom

domains. Similarly, 53% of teachers had often used classroom strategies providing ample opportunities for independent learning. Moreover, 53% of teachers often and 8% had always involved learners in self-learning assessment. Almost the same response was generated on learners' involvement in evaluation (statement 11) or monitoring one's progress (statement 12). Statement 13 enquired about collaborative teaching strategies whereby most of the teachers favored peer-learning.

To sum up, the descriptive statistical analysis in terms of response percentages (Table 1) gave a view of HEIs' English language teachers' positive beliefs about learner autonomy. The results also show that English language teachers have a strong positive inclination towards the development of learner autonomy (Table 2). English language teachers help learners develop autonomy through their teaching-learning practices in the classroom. Like teachers provide opportunities for peer-learning, independent learning, self-evaluation etc. (see Table 2).

4. Discussion

This study contributes to the literature on English language learner autonomy by presenting the pedagogical beliefs and practices of tertiary level teachers in the eastern context (Pakistan). This research reports (a) the English language tertiary level teachers' beliefs about learner autonomy, (b) and how English language teachers help learners develop autonomy through their teaching-learning practices in the classroom. The data analysis shows that the teachers generally find defining the concept of learner autonomy problematic. In like manner, the study of Borg and Al-Busaidi (2012) stated that language teachers were not clear on what learner autonomy means to language teaching. There was confusion between the English language learning situation without the teacher and an informal educational set up or even self-instruction; however, teachers claim that they believe in motivating students to explore learning opportunities independently outside and inside the classroom. Such practices indicate that teachers extend efforts to promote learner autonomy. However, English language teachers make fewer efforts to apply their beliefs in their pedagogical practices as revealed in the study. Therefore, like in the previous research, we have found the inapplicability of the development of learner autonomy in the non-western context (Sonaiya 2002) like Pakistan. The responses on the pedagogical practices' scales also show teachers some inclination towards the development of learner autonomy by practising strategies to ignite behavioural and cognitive actions of language learners. We interpolated it as teachers' awareness of the development of learner autonomy and also bringing that into practice by involving learners: a factor supported by previous research too (Alonazi 2017; Benson 2011b).

Teachers may provide support for the development of language learner autonomy in the classrooms, results reveal that teachers did not give much creative space to learners as expressed in the study that they rarely or at points never involve the learners in making learning decisions (see Table 2). The research on learner autonomy advocated the teacher's role in facilitating creative space for better learning (Nunan 2003; Benson, 2005; Benson 2009; Benson 2011a; Benson 2011b). Data implied, like the previous research, that teachers' positive perceptions about learner autonomy put them in a position to help language learners "accept equal responsibility" for learning and be ready to "undertake initiatives" (Little 1995, p. 178) (see Table 1). Like when it comes to classroom practice, the result shows that the majority of the respondents agree that learner autonomy is promoted when learners have some choice in the kinds of activities they perform; however, the respondents usually do not involve the learners to decide on the learning activities, the materials, setting lesson goals etc.

In short, this study reveals that English language teachers are aware of the importance of the development of LA. However, they find incorporation of learner autonomy facilitating activities less feasible in the traditional education system. We, therefore, conclude that the development of learner autonomy can only be a success when the instruction paradigm of any given social context allows teachers to take initiatives for promoting learner autonomy. In such a context, the traditional stereotypical instruction paradigm may be replaced by the learner-centered learning paradigm; and the active involvement of learners then may become a strong language learning motivator.

The findings of our study, thus, recommend a triangular relationship between instruction paradigm, social context, and learning paradigm for developing LA. This study thus provides a tripartite agreement:

1. The teacher can create a learning environment to support the learners in achieving learner autonomy if the social context favours it. Moreover, a teacher's positive belief in learner autonomy alone may not help them to facilitate and guide learners in developing learning autonomy.

2. Learning paradigm determines teachers' role. It may or may not allow teachers to devise ways and means to encourage autonomous quest of learning.

3. The social context binds the teacher and the learner to behave in the given socio-academic culture. The context determines whether or not there is a need for the teacher to develop learner autonomy by facilitating pedagogical practices.

5. Conclusion

This study has provided insight into the English language tertiary level teachers' beliefs and practices for the development of LA. Since LA is becoming a popular method of learning

in recent years, various ways have been experimented with to encourage this method. The incorporation of LA in the pedagogical techniques may improve and bring desirable results. Some respondent-teachers considered defining learner autonomy problematic and those who defined it, equated it with a state of learning without the aid of a teacher or formal educational set up and even self-instruction. These teachers considered the concept of learner autonomy as a solution to the problems of English language pedagogy in higher education in Pakistan. They found the development of LA as a way of helping learners to overcome the learning barriers cultivated in teacher-centered passive classrooms. Rejecting the autonomy of an individual, this research shows LA as one of the ignored aspects of the English language classroom. Although this study found teachers advocating some degree of freedom for learners, the teachers' centeredness in pedagogical practices remains dominant. The findings of the questionnaire revealed that respondent teachers' pedagogical beliefs either led to the continuation of traditional learner restricting classroom practices or rejection of learner oppressive practices. In the latter case, teachers project themselves as embracers of the concept of learner autonomy and try to promote interest in the learner-centered classroom practices (although the ratio of such teachers in this group is limited).

We recommend that further research involving quant-qual research design may be conducted to investigate the role of the teachers in the classroom for developing English language learner autonomy in the non-western context (as to date the research in this field claims that it is a western concept). The perceptions of the learners on the role of the teachers in the development of the learner autonomy may also be explored. The mixed-method study on the learner autonomy enhancing English language teaching-learning strategies may also be conducted to explore the concept of learner responsibility, learner independence, learner empowerment, learner centeredness etc. This research may well be applied as a model for exploring a variety of pedagogical issues pertaining to English language teaching and may provide some insights to form strategies to tackle them. We propose that the development of LA components may be included in the professional training of the teachers through seminars, lectures, conferences etc. In Pakistani universities, in general, teachers' professional development is not given importance.

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