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DEVELOPING HAPPY AND MOTIVATED LEARNERS

Auxiliar curricular

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1. Introduction

Learners need to be prepared effectively for their future careers. It is true that if learners have the ability to manage their own learning, they will be better prepared and accomplish learning with ease. Within this context of education, the role of learner autonomy has become one of the prominent themes in teaching and learning due to its influence on helping learners reach their potential. Over the last two decades, whether there is a clear distinction between autonomous and non-autonomous learners has been debated. Learner autonomy simply is learners' taking responsibility for their own learning. In other words, the shift of control over learning occurs from teachers to learners and learners take active role in their learning process.

Affective variables might influence language learners. For instance, motivation and learner autonomy are two significant factors which might impact language learning process. It is important to point that helping learners to become independent learners is considered crucial in language education. Unless learners are motivated to learn, they will fail to develop their autonomy. The relationship between learner autonomy and effective language learning has also become a popular focus in language teaching. This study attempts to

exhibit the major characteristics of autonomous learners and endeavors to put forth the role of learner autonomy on language learning.

2. Learner Autonomy -Definitions

Learner autonomy was first elaborated by Henri Holec (1981) who defined it as learner control. In other words, learner autonomy is helping learners to develop responsibility for their own learning. According to Benson (2001) learner autonomy is taking control over learning management, cognitive process and learning content. While control over learning management refers to behaviors learners use for planning, control over cognitive process is related to the psychology of learning. And control over learning content pertains to the freedom of learners to determine their goals and objectives. Learner autonomy on a general note, is a move towards more learner-centered learning and is used for situations where learners conduct learning on their own. Also, autonomous learners can apply the skills they have learned in their own learning. Moreover, such learners can independently set goals, direct and oversee their learning. Little (1991) argues that learner autonomy is "essentially a matter of the learner's psychological relation to the process and content of learning a capacity for detachment, critical reflection, decision-

making, and independent action" (p. 4). Learners can act independently in their learning. In other words, freedom to a small extent is necessary to develop learner autonomy. Dickinson (1987) described autonomy as "the situation in which the learner is totally responsible for all of the decisions concerned with his learning and the implementation of those decisions" (p.11). Once again, the independence of learners has come to the fore. However, learner autonomy without teacher aid cannot be achieved. It should be kept in mind that learner autonomy is a pedagogical dialogue between learners and teacher (Benson, 2006).

Omaggio (1978) listed some major characteristics of autonomous learners:

1. They have an understanding of learning strategies and styles

2. They can look at the learning task from a different aspect

3. They are risk takers

4. They are good at guessing

Autonomous learners have the ability to implement learning strategies they have learnt from their teachers in their own learning process. As they have insights about the learning styles, they can approach tasks from different angles. In order to achieve their goals, they take risks and they can make accurate estimates. Autonomous learners are associated with motivation

and aspiration. They can motivate themselves to accomplish their goals. Similarly, Holec (1981) underlies the capacities of autonomous learners and states that "autonomous learners assume responsibility for determining the purpose, content, rhythm and method of their learning, monitoring its progress and evaluating its outcomes" (p. 3). It is clearly emphasized that autonomous learners can organize their resources to accomplish their goals.

It should be emphasized that there is a link between motivation and autonomy and only learners with enhanced motivation take responsibility for their own learning (Ushioda, 2006; Benson, 2006; Yildiz, 2019). To put forward the link between autonomy and motivation, Ushioda emphasized the crucial role of motivation on the development of learner autonomy and argues that "without motivation, there is no autonomy" (p.40).

Learners need to achieve self-directed learning which is considered as a necessary condition for learner autonomy. Self-directed learning is "a process in which individuals take the initiative, with or without the help of others, in diagnosing their learning needs, formulating learning goals, identifying human and material resources for learning, choosing and implementing appropriate learning strategies, and evaluating learning

outcomes" (Knowles, 1975, p. 18). Self-directed learning is an effective method to help learners acquire the necessary skills and abilities, and knowledge they need throughout their lives. Curiosity, aspiration and creativity are related to self-directed learning (Edmondson, Boyer, & Artis, 2012).

It should be kept in mind that autonomous learning does not mean learning without a teacher. On the contrary teachers "have a crucial role to play in launching learners into self-access and in lending them a regular helping hand to stay afloat" (Sheerin, 1997, p. 63). Teachers do not become redundant in autonomous learning, they show the way to learners to help them follow the path. Teachers have primary responsibility for motivating students to learn (Mart, 2011, 2013a, 2013b; Yildiz & Celik, 2017; Yildiz, 2017). Teachers create certain conditions for learners to enable them attain learner autonomy. Regarding the significance of teacher role in fostering learner autonomy, Johnson, Pardesi and Paine (1990) argue that learner autonomy is contingent upon teacher autonomy because "teachers' autonomy permeates into learners' autonomy' (Johnson, Pardesi, & Paine, 1990, p.51).

Traditional classroom does not promote learner autonomy. Therefore, teachers need to create new ways of teaching in which learners have some degree of freedom about

their learning. In a teacher-centered approach, learners cannot find adequate number of options to develop their self-directed learning. Learners should be provided opportunities in which they manage their own learning.

3. Learner Autonomy in the Context of Language Acquisition

Littlewood (1997, p.81) proposed a three-stage model about levels of learner autonomy in language learning:

a) Language acquisition

b) Learning approach

c) Personal Development

Autonomy in the context of language acquisition refers to an ability to act independently and communicate in the target language in real situations. For increasing learners' proficiency in language, the effective use of target language is essential (Mart, 2012). Autonomy in the context of learning approach involves ability to control over one's own learning and apply relevant strategies. And autonomy in the context of personal development is related to attaining autonomy with a higher level. Likewise, Macaro (2000) proposed a three-stage autonomy model in language learning (pp. 170-172):

a) Autonomy of language competence

b) Autonomy of language learning competence

c) Autonomy of choice and action

Benson (2006, p.24) has also a three-stage model about levels of learner autonomy in language learning:

a) Learning management

b) Cognitive processing

c) The content of learning

All of these models proposed by different researchers aim to develop learner autonomy. A great many factors including affective and cognitive variables influence language learning. The concept of learning strategy, for instance, is in the focus of interest in the development of learner autonomy (Huang, 2006). Motivation is a crucial factor for attaining autonomy and encourages learners for active involvement in the language learning process. Additionally, individual differences are also related to the achievement of learner autonomy. Finally, teacher autonomy is one of the most important factors which influence learner autonomy. It goes without saying that teacher autonomy and learner autonomy are linked to each other. Teacher autonomy refers to teachers' having freedom in curriculum implementation (Benson, 2006). Teacher autonomy also includes professional development. Teacher development holds an important place in education as teachers need to "create

educationally sound, contextually appropriate, and socially equitable learning opportunities for the students they teach" (Johnson, 2006, p.235).

The development of autonomy leads to better language learning. The link between learner autonomy and effective language learning has been largely explored in researches. Corno and Mandinach (1983) in their study found that learner autonomy implied better acquisition of language proficiency. Zhang and Li (2004) pointed out that autonomous learners achieved high scores in a language test. It is possible to conclude that learner autonomy is a significant factor for the development of language proficiency.

4. Strategies to develop learner autonomy in language teaching

The idea of learner autonomy is not new, but it has been widely referred to in the field of ELT only over the last decade. The definition of autonomy was first introduced into the educational field by Holec, who is considered a father of autonomous learning, describing it as "the ability to take charge of one's own learning". He also mentioned that this ability "is not inborn but must be acquired by "natural" means or (as most often happens) by formal learning, i.e. in a systematic, deliberate

way", and pointed out that "to take charge of one's own learning is to have … the responsibility for all the decisions concerning all aspects of learning …". Holec's definition about autonomy has exerted a huge influence on autonomy research and has been thought of as a beginning for subsequent relevant research.

As a significant social agent who shapes the quality of students' intellectual and social experiences, the teacher has a critical role to play in helping students to exert autonomy both inside and outside the classroom. Consequently, teachers should clearly know the strategies how to play their roles in developing learner autonomy while doing teaching or guiding in-class and out-of-class. A major part of implementing autonomy in-class and out-of-class is to instruct various strategies, and assist students in finding the most suitable methods for them.

4.1.Teach the students how to learn.

4.1.1.Learning to learn: note-taking and vocabulary

Show the students how to learn, teach different study skills and strategies, even simple ones like writing coloured words on papers, highlighting key words, creating mind maps, techniques to remember the words better. Show them the ways they can use course books at home (listening to the tracks and working with transcripts, retelling the stories, etc.) Train learners to identify their own preferred learning styles and strategies. While some

students like sitting passively, reading, or translating, others prefer creating tables and diagrams.

Keeping *one's notes well-organised* is a skill that will help students not only throughout their education but very likely in their working lives as well. Of course, some students are naturally more organised in this regard than others. We have all had students who diligently employ a range of coloured pens in their well-kept notebooks, underlining certain words and highlighting others.

However, other students might not have a notebook at all, using whatever scraps of paper come to hand instead. The first thing then is to ensure that everyone has a notebook and that they make consistent use of it. To encourage the latter, you might want to take students' notebooks in periodically, in the same way you take in homework, to keep an eye of how they are being used.

Once everyone has a notebook, it pays to dedicate some time to illustrating ways of organising a notebook that are appropriate for students of English. At its simplest, this involves encouraging them to divide it into different sections. This could involve starting a new page or section each lesson, or it might entail having different sections for grammar, vocabulary, useful phrases for conversation, useful phrases for writing, homework

notes and so on. Obvious as this might sound as a strategy for good note-taking, it isn't necessarily so for younger learners.

We can even *make a lesson activity out of it by showing your students two different ways of dividing their notebooks* and having them discuss the pros and cons of each. It's important to bear in mind that what works well for one student might not work well for another, so you shouldn't be draconian about it.
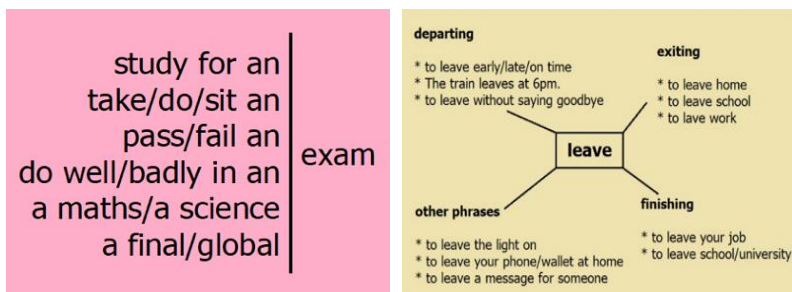
When it comes to *vocabulary*, a lot can be done to record new words and phrases systematically, especially when it comes to collocation. For instance, you can have students set aside a page for collocations with make and do, and, if appropriate for the level, another for collocations with play, go and do.

Recording sets of collocations in one place will not only help students notice patterns but will also make it easier to review their learning at different stages throughout the course, including before exams.

Collocation grids such as the following can be added to as and when new collocations are learned:

make	do	
✔		a mistake
	✔	the shopping
	✔	a good job
✔		friends
	✔	your homework
	✔	the housework
✔		the bed
	✔	somebody a favour
✔		an effort

Collocations can also be recorded in substitution tables or even as spidergrams:

study for an		
take/do/sit an		
pass/fail an	exam	
do well/badly in an		
a maths/a science		
a final/global		

departing
* to leave early/late/on time
* The train leaves at 6pm.
* to leave without saying goodbye

exiting
* to leave home
* to leave school
* to lave work

leave

other phrases
* to leave the light on
* to leave your phone/wallet at home
* to leave a message for someone

finishing
* to leave your job
* to leave school/university

To get students focussing on word formation (an especially useful skill for those preparing for FCE, CAE or CPE exams) and phrases related to key words, you might want to give an example of a word cloud, like the one below for friend, and then encourage them to come up with their own for other root words such as science, act, decide, believe, love and so on. As with collocation grids, these can be added to as and when new words are learned.

friendly

boyfriend

to unfriend someone
(on social media)

friendliest

to befriend someone

girlfriend

FRIEND

friendliness

unfriendliness

a best friend

an old friend

to friend someone
(on social media)

friendlier

unfriendly

friendship

4.1.2.Flipped learning, flash card style

Flash cards are a tried and tested method for studying vocabulary and a great way to encourage students to **take more control of their own learning**, not only in the sense that they can actually make the flash cards themselves, but also if you allow them the freedom to choose the vocabulary they personally wish to focus on.

There are **various types of flash card** that can be made, with the target word or phrase on one side and a definition, an antonym, a synonym, a gapped sentence, a translation, or even a picture on the flip side.

Repeat, now wait, repeat again The **spaced repetition system** is founded on the theory that when faced with a large number of items to learn – in the context of second language learning, items of vocabulary – we're far more likely to commit them permanently to memory if we review them not only repeatedly but at **increasingly spaced intervals**. The idea is that learning has most effect when the items in question are beginning to slip from our memory and require some effort to recall, as opposed to cramming, which works well when we need to learn and recall information in the short term – say, for an exam – but is not very effective for long-term acquisition.

Software has been developed using **algorithms that**

make use of SRS in learning apps such as [Anki](#) and [Quizlet](#).

However, there's no reason why your students can't use sets of good old-fashioned homemade flash cards as an easy and effective low-tech alternative.

Step 1. Students make **a set of flash cards** for the vocabulary to be learned. These can be items you assign yourself, or, better still, you can **get the students to mine their notebooks for vocabulary** that has come up during previous lessons which they personally want to focus on. The set should be reasonably large not only to make it worthwhile in terms of how much they eventually learn but also to make sure they have to really exercise their memory.

Step 2. During the following lesson, **students work in pairs to test each other** with the flash cards.

Step 3. A couple of lessons later, **students test themselves again.**

Step 4. Wait several lessons and then have the **students test themselves again.** By now, it should be clear which ones they have learned and which ones still aren't sticking.

This process can be repeated, at **increasingly spaced intervals**, until the students can confidently recall all the items when first presented with the flash cards. In terms of learning to learn, it's important to **draw students' attention to the process**

itself and to explain to them exactly why you are doing it, including pointing out **its effectiveness vis-à-vis cramming**, so that they can go away and use it for themselves when studying at home and even for other subjects.

4.2. Highlight the importance of self-evaluation.

What is significant in learning is setting an objective. Ask the students set the objectives and then have them evaluate their progress. Moreover, to increase students' self-awareness you might ask your students to write down what they have learnt at the lesson, what they liked/dislike about the lesson, what information was new/easy/difficult, what they have not understood very well. Self-evaluation can be done at any age. As a teacher, you can also raise students' awareness by telling them what you're going to do each lesson, and why you're doing it.

4.3.   Make the students research and find the answers themselves

During the lesson, students might often ask "What does X mean?". Students are looking for a quick answer because the problem is not really important to them, it is just a hindrance to their completion of the task. Sometimes hurdles are things the student has never learned before and does not know yet, and

sometimes they are things that students have learned before but have forgotten. Giving a quick answer to the student's question, such as a definition—or worse, a translation—for the word, does not help them over the hurdle. If you remove the hurdle every time the runner approaches one, then he or she will never learn how to get over the hurdles they encounter in the future without you. We should make our students work for the answers to even the small questions, have them make the effort. It is not just about them finding the answer to the question they're asking now; it is about learning how to find answers to questions they might have in the future. Ask them to guess the meaning from the context, search online to investigate what the correct answers are. The same approach is suitable for quizzes, just don't give the answers but ask to search for the information in English.

4.4. Provide guidance to study and use English outside the classroom

Show students the ways to improve their English outside the classroom. Give them a list of tasks that might motivate them and ask them to try something new every week (you can even have a challenge marathon). As a teacher, you can personalize by assigning different exercises to different learners. Provide the links to the resources, for example, if the students' weakness is

listening, give them a list of websites with exercises, which they can do and check on their own.

4.5. Use task-based learning approach

Task-based language teaching has become increasingly popular in the field of language teaching and learning.

The following homework choice board, intended for students at B1 level and above, suggests 16 tasks to practise all four skills as well as grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation:

- Students can choose the tasks based on their personal interests, or areas they feel they need more work on, which should result in extra motivation.
- In the process of choosing an activity, students will be taking into account the skills and language items that are being practised in class, but also what is relevant to them, especially when they can connect the task with their own life.
- The activities on the board are also flexible as far as proficiency level is concerned, which means that students can work at their own performance level.
- A few tasks have been designed so that they can be used later in class, resulting in excellent materials based on students' interests which can be introduced in different lessons later in the year.

- Although the tasks here have been selected so they are easy to keep track of, holding students accountable for their work, should ideally be another step in helping students develop their learner independence skills. How would you use this board in your own student tracking system? How would you assess each of these tasks?

Homework Choice Board

Read a news article about some current event. Write 10 interview questions you would ask one of the people involved in the story.	Choose a picture, record a description of it, and send it to your teacher. Make sure you bring a copy of the picture so that we can try to guess it in class!	Choose a word you have learnt recently that is at least 6 letters long and write an acrostic poem. P _____ O _____ E _____ M _____	Listen to a song and read the lyrics. Choose 10 words that are new to you and write a sentence with each of them.

Draw a word web with 6 new words you have learnt recently, and think of 5 words related to each of them.	Write a different ending to a story or film you have read or watched recently. Provide a summary of the plot first.
	THE END
		Re-read a recent composition you've written, choose 10 mistakes you made, and provide the correct answers with an explanation for each of the mistakes. ✓	Read a short story or graded reader and complete a story map about it:
			- Setting:
			- Characters:
			- Plot : 1....
			  2....
			  3....
			- Solution:

Choose a grammar point you have studied recently and write 10 sentences that illustrate it. Alternatively, create a video explaining that grammar point in your own words.	Read a news article or story, or watch a short film. Retell the story from the perspective of one of the people involved in the story.	Watch a video, film or TV show and write a summary, including your personal opinion, and 10 questions you would ask about it.	Write a reflection about how you are doing in English, things you find difficult or easy, and what your plans are to improve the most difficult ones.
Record yourself reading a short text aloud and send it to your teacher.	Choose 10 new adjectives you have learnt recently and write a synonym and an antonym for each of them. *small – tiny – big*	Create a crossword puzzle using 15 words you have worked on recently.	Choose your own task! Why have you chosen to do it? Which skill(s) have you practised? How will it help you improve your English? **?**

Apart from traditional homework tasks based on lessons delivered in the classroom, there is still a myriad of activities students can do by themselves to practise their English, learn to work independently, and take responsibility for their own learning. Learner autonomy is in fact one of the most important things we can promote if we really want to get our students ready for the ongoing, lifelong language learning endeavour.

Teacher's role is both necessary and significant to guarantee and enhance or promote learner autonomy and for that reason can never and forever be neglected. Without teacher's guidance and supervision, the total autonomous learning process will lead to low efficiency and even fall into disorder. Autonomous learning is not necessarily learning alone, nor is it necessarily learning without a teacher.

Cuprins

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