

The status of autonomy in learning English as a foreign language with a particular emphasis on the Kurdistan's public education system

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Abstract

The idea of learner autonomy, whereby the learner takes personal responsibility for and control of the learning process, is an unfamiliar concept for many students used to being taught languages in the traditional manner. The aim of this study, therefore, is to examine the perceptions and attitudes of students regarding autonomous learning, particularly those studying English as a foreign language. The students who agreed to participate are in the 12th grade of high school and come from the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. In addition to its main focus, the study investigated factors such as how inclined the students are toward the idea of greater self-direction in their studies; the amount of independent language learning they undertake outside of the classroom (excluding homework); how influential the teacher's role is; what language learning activities are offered; how the lesson content is chosen; the connection between motivation and assessment; and the level of interest there is in knowing about the target language's culture. Moreover, the study examined what activities the students take part in (inside and outside of the classroom setting) and consider how these relate to the learner autonomy framework.

Introduction

There is an argument stating that second language acquisition (SLA) has become an individual and personal task, with learners learning new languages independent of any instruction from institutions. Indeed, Benson (2001) holds the view that SLA actually predates institutionalised learning before going on to say that there are millions of people learning foreign or second languages without any formal teaching. In these cases, the focus is on the idea of autonomy as it relates to the learning of language. Meanwhile Wenden (1991) ascribes the attention given to the role of learners in language learning to the more communicatively oriented concept of language learning and teaching.

Undeniably, learning another language is not an easy task; it is a process that requires dedication and time. The idea of autonomy, however, introduces a purposeful aspect to the learning process because it requires the student to take responsibility for his/her learning, which encourages them to become more involved in each stage of their studies. Indeed, Omaggio's (cited in Wenden, 1991)

observations about what makes a good language learner emphasises the important role autonomy plays in language learning. He declares that good language learners are people who: i) are aware of their strengths and weaknesses; ii) understand how they learn and what learning strategies are available to them, and know how to adapt these to various learning situations; and iii) communicate in their target language at every opportunity. Thus, when weighing up all the benefits mastering a foreign language can bring in today's global society, Cook's (2008, p.1) assertion that "monolinguals are becoming almost an endangered species" is ever more pertinent. This is because the world will need citizens who are highly competent, and there is no doubt that as society moves toward greater integration language skills will be one of the most important attributes a modern citizen can acquire.

In fact, during the last decade, there has been a gradual shift away from traditional English language teaching toward a more communicative based teaching model (as defined by Nunan and Lamb, 1996) within Kurdistan's English language learning and teaching institutions. However, for Kurdish students the idea of learner autonomy is still comparatively novel. Consequently, as autonomous learning has not been part of their cultural and educational backgrounds, encouraging learners to engage with this concept has occasionally been problematic.

Literature Review

What is meant by autonomy in language learning?

The idea behind the learner autonomy theory is that directly involving students in the decision-making processes that affect their own language proficiency will mean that learners "are likely to be more enthusiastic about learning" (Littlejohn, 1985, p.258), and thus their learning becomes more purposeful and tailored to their individual needs (Dam, 1995). Benson, in his 2011 paper details many examples of autonomous learning, and even goes on to attempt to compare various definitions. His argument is that by promoting autonomy in learning it may be possible to assess whether learners attain greater control over the way in which their learning progresses by, for instance, observing whether they can reflect on the benefits of their learning activities, are more capable of self-assessment with regard to their learning goals, or if they are able to design their own personal learning plans (p.51). This agrees with the *Dictionary of Language Teaching and Applied Linguistics* (Richards and Schmidt, 2002), which says that learning autonomy is "the principle that learners should be encouraged to assume a maximum amount of responsibility for what they learn and how they learn it" (p.297).

Moreover, Smith's assertion that "learners have the power and right to learn for themselves" (2008, p.2) is regarded as a vital tenet of the learner autonomy theory. The support for greater learner autonomy is continued by Benson (2008) who is in agreement with Little (1995) when he says that "because the concept of autonomy in learning draws its meaning from the concept of personal autonomy, it is centrally concerned with the kind of learning that best helps people to lead autonomous lives."

Indeed, Little's earlier 1991 paper argues that the concept of 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." He emphasises this stance in 1995 when he further explains that learner autonomy "aims to equip learners to play an active role in participatory democracy." However, Henry Holec (1981, cited in Little, 1991, p.6), who when it comes to autonomy is regarded as the subject's leading authority (Benson, 2001), chose to concentrate on the concept of individual freedom. In an example of this, he focuses particularly on the necessity of building up a person's sense of freedom by expanding that person's existing abilities. This, Holec believes, then allows the person to take a more responsible role in the society he is part of.

Indeed, in relation to autonomy in language learning, there have been many different ways used to describe it. Here, again, Holec (1981, cited in Benson and Voller, 1997, p.1) defines the process of language learning autonomy as the chance for an individual to take charge of their own learning experience. By this he means that learners who are autonomous are able to have more influence over their personal learning processes, the aims of their learning, and even the manner in which they learn. Holec (1981) even goes on to give some examples of where learners can assert their responsibility over all aspects of their learning experience. First of all, the learner must determine what the objectives of his/her learning are. Secondly, the learner must then define the contents of his/her learning and the progressions he/she wants to attain. Thirdly, the learner needs to choose what methods and techniques he/she will use in the learning process. Fourthly, the learner must carefully supervise his/her acquisition procedure. Finally, Holec's fifth point emphasises the importance of the learner's own evaluation of what has been achieved.

Despite this, though, Benson (2001, p.8) comments that, "autonomy is not a method of learning." Instead, he claims that autonomy can be considered a "natural product of the practice of self-directed learning" and it is through this that the learner determines the objectives, evaluation and progress of learning. However, according to Little (1991, p.4), autonomy is defined as a capacity that helps learners to attain "critical reflection, decision-making, independent action." Moreover, Little thinks that autonomy is an indication of a high degree of independence and once this independence is attained then any misconceptions, which will be discussed below, will be cleared up. Benson and Voller (1997) express a similar view, going on to state that autonomy and independence in language learning can be linked to the capacity of an individual to behave as a responsible person. This idea is supported by Rogers' (1969, p.288) notion of an autonomous individual as "a fully functioning person." By this he means that the person relies mostly on him/herself to acquire language. This view corresponds to what Benson (1997, p.19) called "technical autonomy", a concept that expands on the theme of learner autonomy by exploring the idea of learning language without the aid of a teacher and outside the structured curriculum of an institution.

The idea of independence within the classroom setting is not a new concept and Dickinson (1992) expresses a similar view. He maintains that independence is something that language learners engage with during their learning process, even if that process takes place in a “restrictive, teacher-centred classroom.” Nevertheless, when it comes to successfully mastering a foreign language and being actively engaged in the learning process, it is vital that the learner possesses some of the attributes that will help them develop strong language skills. Fundamentally, good language learners are people who think creatively, possess confidence in their own abilities, are capable of determining their own learning strategy, and who never miss an opportunity to put their language skills to use. However, another attribute common to good language learners is motivation: indeed, motivation acts as the catalyst at the start of any undertaking. This is because, as Dornyei (1998, cited in Brown, 2000, p.160) says, motivation provides “a key to learning” by supplying the impetus to push someone towards a goal: in this case, the desire to learn a new language. Indeed, evidence from various research studies agrees with the idea that “increasing the level of learner control will increase the level of self-determination, thereby increasing overall motivation in the development of learner autonomy” (Chan, 2001, p.506). Consequently, if learner autonomy within language learning classrooms is to progress it is obvious that not only must students be included in the decision-making processes that affect their learning opportunities, they must also have a high degree of personal motivation.

What is not autonomy?

In contrast to the opinions about autonomy expressed above, Little (1991) identifies five misconceptions that are regarded as hostile to the learner autonomy concept. The first of these is that autonomy is “synonymous with self-instruction” (p.3), meaning that learners do not need a teacher while they are learning a language. The second misconception is that learner autonomy in a classroom context means asking the teacher to give up control and stop taking initiatives. There are two points to this misconception: the first is to assume that the learners will be fully autonomous within the classroom context, thus making the teacher redundant. The second point assumes that if the teacher intervenes in the learners’ learning process then any autonomy achieved by the learners will be lost.

The third misconception with regard to learning autonomy within the classroom is that this “is something teachers do to their learners” (Little, 1991, p.3). Nevertheless, Little believes that this misconception is not completely mistaken because there are some learners who would not be autonomous if it was not for the help and encouragement given to them by their teachers.

When it comes to the fourth misconception, Little supports the idea of autonomy being seen as a behaviour. However, at the same time, he claims that behaviour is dependent on the age of the learner, how that learner has progressed with his/her

learning and how he/she thinks about learning. In short, then, autonomy is demonstrable in many ways.

The fifth and final misconception about the learner autonomy concept as identified by Little is similar to the fourth one in that it is believed that autonomy “is a steady state achieved by certain learners” (Ibid., p.4). He goes on to say that he believes that autonomy is probably difficult to achieve, but that it may not be retained permanently. The reasoning behind this is that it is thought that a learner may have a high degree of autonomy in one subject, but he/she may be non-autonomous in another.

What role(s) does the teacher play when looking at the context of autonomy in language learning?

Learning a target language in context means that the learner is exposed to communicative interactions that seem natural and authentic. There is no doubt that this is a more effective method of language learning than other conventional techniques. This is because the language used “would appear to be closer to first-language acquisition” (Harmer, 2007, p.50), which in turn affects the subconscious. To put it another way, it is believed that the learners use “their instinct”, which is a “mental capacity we are all born with”, to act “upon the language they hear”. This “transforms it into a knowledge of the language and an ability to speak it” (Ibid., p.49).

However, expecting teachers to develop and encourage an autonomous learning experience within a language learning setting is unfeasible if they have not themselves undergone teacher training that included key components such as evaluative and exploratory approaches to learning and teaching (Burkert and Schwienhorst, 2008). This is because the role(s) played by teachers is of prime importance: Wright (1987, p.10), for example, describes them as being “father, mother, judge, salesman, technician, librarian and more within the role”. Indeed, in Smith and Erdoğan (2007), and Burkert and Schwienhorst (2008) evidence is provided that suggests students who are taught by teachers who were or are not themselves autonomous learners are adversely affected in their learning autonomy experiences.

Nevertheless, Benson and Voller (1997) simply report that the teacher’s role is to teach in such a way as to make effective changes in their learners and so what this paper will focus on are the role(s) of the teacher as they relate to language learning autonomy. This approach is supported by Benson (2001) who notes that there is an increasing tendency for recent literature to focus on the part played by the teacher when it comes to autonomous learning by looking at, for example, “teachers’ professional development and teacher education” (Ibid., p.171). Barnes (1976, cited in Benson, 2001, p.171) states that he sees the role of teachers as providing continuity from transmission to interpretation, and transmission teaching is something that is supported by the positivism philosophy whereby the teacher takes the main role in order “to evaluate and correct learners’ performance” (Benson, 2001, p.172) while the learners pay attention to them. This can suggest that positivism advocates a teacher-led approach, something that is discussed within positivism as being

indicative of a traditional relationship. In an autonomous learning context, on the other hand, the teacher's role changes into an interpretation of teaching that is designed to "set up dialogues in which learners reorganise their state of knowledge" (Benson, 2001, p.172). This approach is connected to constructivism which takes the view that knowledge is constructed not learned. Wright (1987, cited in Benson and Voller) defines the role of the teacher "As having two functions: management function, which is related to [the] social side of teaching, particularly to motivation and control of learners, and an instrument function, which is connected to the task-orientated side" (Benson and Voller, 1997, p.99). Thus, according to the critical theory approach, the teacher's role is to "emphasize [the] issue of power and control within language" (Benson, 1997, p.22). This is in order to let the learners take responsibility for their own learning and the context in which it takes place.

In other words, a teacher who uses the autonomous constructivist approach in the classroom has confidence that not only do they know what they are doing they can explain why they are doing it. This is because teachers practising this technique can draw on a fundamental body of knowledge that covers both theoretical and practical concerns. A teacher who is comfortable with the concept of autonomy is able to both understand how and what their students are thinking as well as devise strategies to promote and develop the culture of constructivism.

Interactions between teachers and learners in the learning autonomy process

It is essential that teachers and learners work collaboratively in order for the learning autonomy process to be successful. Thus, as this requires a large amount of interaction between them, a thorough investigation into how this is achieved is necessary. In this process, the task for the teacher is two-fold: not only does he/she have to persuade the learners to take control of their learning activities, implement the plans they make and evaluate the outcomes, the teacher also must support them to become independent enough to achieve these goals.

Obviously, the interactions that take place between the teacher and the learners in this process are crucial to the successful acquisition of a second language. It is therefore essential that both sides have an understanding of the concepts of teacher autonomy and learner autonomy so that everyone can adjust easily to the practicalities of implementing a learner autonomous environment within a classroom setting. Smith (2001) adds one more opinion to the discussion with his belief that "Teachers also need to constantly reflect on their own role in the classroom, monitoring the extent to which they constrain or scaffold students' thinking and behavior, so as to engage students in autonomous and effective learning".

The process of developing a learner autonomous classroom environment is an endless one for all concerned. To begin, the teacher has to introduce a learning strategy that slowly encourages the learners to take joint responsibility for their

learning. In some instances where learners indicate they want to take charge of their learning, it may be necessary for the teacher to let them learn on their own while offering support should they need it. Indeed, depending on the situation, a teacher's ability to effectively manage learner autonomy within the classroom could fluctuate. However, learner autonomy cannot simply be thought of as a desire for learners to be free of curriculum restraints, the teacher, or the requirement to learn. Instead, Berofsky (1997) says learner autonomy means "the learner's freedom from self, by which we mean his or her capacity to transcend the limitations of personal heritage." Therefore, it is up to the teachers to create an atmosphere in which learners can acquire and practise their language skills in an autonomous manner.

Although encouraging teachers to involve their learners in activities that promote systematic reflection, evaluation and assessment on a regular basis is important, it is also paramount that the learners receive tangible evidence that they are progressing. This feedback should not just be given after they have been tested but rather should be an expected part of their learning process as positive, evaluative communication will help build up the learners' levels of motivation. At the same time, it is equally important that teachers make regular reviews of their teaching practices.

Activities designed to encourage learner autonomy

To be truly autonomous, a person must understand their strengths and weaknesses, and then build up a reserve of techniques and resources on which to draw when needed. In the case of second language acquisition, these resources include factors that help with improving listening, reading, speaking and writing skills by maximising a learner's exposure to the target language. In addition, learners need to understand which techniques best aid their learning, which includes investigating various learning strategies and styles (Brazis and Kavaliauskienė, 2000). Understandably, it will be necessary for each learner to take their time in order to discover what works most effectively for them. During this time it is important that their teacher designs activities and homework assignments that encourage the learner to explore, which could spark an enthusiasm for autonomous learning. This is because it is not only the teacher's job to teach language; they must also advise their learners how to continue their studies outside of the confines of the classroom. These activities could require the learners to investigate areas such as online forums, interactive blogs, films, TV shows, discussion boards, games (traditional and computer), music, videos, written text etc. In fact, any outlet that uses the target language and that might engage the learner should be considered.

In his 1996 research, Nunan (p.21) describes what an autonomous classroom should be like. He contrasts this with a non-autonomous classroom where, in general, decisions about what should be taught and when are decided by the teacher or

institution. In autonomous classrooms, the students are involved in the decision-making process. For example, an environment that is autonomous takes account of the needs and interests of the students and introduces them to a range of learning activities and experiences designed to fulfil their expectations. In a non-autonomous environment, however, the students are given a set of pre-decided activities, which they are expected to complete. With regard to assessments and evaluations, environments that promote autonomous learning encourage their students to reflect upon, assess, and evaluate their personal learning achievements. A non-autonomous learning environment has a traditional, rigid approach to assessment and evaluation, which are measured through the use of tests and exams.

Methodology

For this study, sixty 12th grade high school students from Ranya, which is situated in Iraq's Kurdistan Region, were asked to participate. 38% of the students were female, while the remaining 62% were male. All had received a conventional education, which means their learning experience was teacher-centred and exam-oriented. This is entirely normal within a traditional educational setting where the role of the teacher is an authoritative one, the teaching methods didactic, and memorization and rote-learning techniques are used extensively (Gahin and Myhill, 2001).

Next, fifteen randomly chosen students were interviewed. The study adopted a semi-structured interview approach, which allowed the students to freely express their opinions and feelings, as well as take into account individual responses. In addition, other, open-ended questions were asked, which were designed to elicit responses that revealed the students' general understanding about the concept of learner autonomy. The questions corresponded to the categories included in the questionnaire and the interviews were recorded and transcribed at a later date so that all the relevant information was documented.

The purpose of the study was to examine the students' general attitudes to learner autonomy, their preparedness for self-direction, what independent language learning activities they undertook, how influential the role of their teacher was, what language learning activities they were offered, how the lesson content was chosen, the connection between motivation and assessment, and what interest they had in knowing about their target language's culture. Each of the questions was linked to the principles of learner autonomy and can be used in foreign language classrooms. In addition, they raised points about potential problems that should be considered when implementing these principles. It may be possible to use the study's findings to develop guidelines that help promote greater independence and learner autonomy for students reluctant to move away from traditional educational methods, which would be useful for foreign language educators and learners alike.

Results

As can be seen in Table 1 below, the majority of the students who took part in the survey demonstrate a readiness to take control of their own direction with regard to language learning. Indeed, the Table reveals that more than half are prepared to assume responsibility for their learning objectives with a similar number stating that they will continue their English language learning in the future without the benefit of teacher-led lessons. These results indicate that the students possess high levels of perseverance and self-determination when it comes to their studies. In addition, the interview results show that most of the students believe they do not easily give up trying to learn even when they encounter difficulties: most responded that when this happened they sought advice from other learners and/or teachers, or searched for answers online.

| statements | Always | Very often | Some times | Rarely | Never |
|--|--------|------------|------------|--------|-------|
| I will continue to learn English in the future without the help of a teacher | 51.7 | 20.6 | 16.2 | 6.8 | 4.7 |
| I am ready to take responsibility for my language learning | 40.4 | 19.3 | 21.6 | 10.4 | 8.3 |
| I worry about compensating for any deficiencies in my language skills | 30.2 | 30.5 | 17.6 | 15.7 | 6 |
| I am persistent and do not give up easily | 48.2 | 24.2 | 18.3 | 6.1 | 3.2 |
| I regularly undertake self-study | 21.2 | 19.1 | 28.3 | 21.2 | 10.2 |

Table 1: The students' readiness for self-direction (100%)

On the other hand, though, the results indicate there were fewer students studying on their own, independently of any homework they had been set; although, there was strong evidence that outside of the classroom environment some of the students did try to speak English with their friends. Interestingly, the interview findings discovered that, sometimes, English usage was commonplace in conversations between friends; in the songs they listened to; the films they watched; the dictionaries and other reference material they used; and on social media sites such as Facebook. In fact, only five of the students interviewed said they did not use English outside of their classrooms.

There were also some interesting findings about the respondents' attitudes to independent language learning, as can be seen in Table 2. Out of all of those who participated in the survey, the majority indicated that they were happy to read simple English texts, even though over one third were not enthusiastic about willingly using

English resources. Approximately two thirds of the interviewees stated that they liked activities that required them to learn by themselves, which supports the earlier finding that most have a strong leaning toward autonomous study. However, although a quarter indicated that they occasionally studied on their own, 41% said they believed in the importance of individual learning. Despite this, though, 39% of the interviewees did not believe that they studied better or learned more when they did this alone; these results support the findings from the questionnaires. Moreover, out the fifteen students who took part in the survey, only seven said they undertook any independent English language study aside from what their teachers set as homework. Some of the extra-curricular activities they take part in include reading; watching films; memorising new words and phrases, many of which use English wording that the students must learn. It still remains, however, that eight of those asked did no extra learning other than the tasks they were given by their teachers.

| Statements | Always | Very often | Some times | Rarely | Never |
|--|--------|------------|------------|--------|-------|
| I read basic English texts | 29 | 25.6 | 18.4 | 14.6 | 12.4 |
| I willingly use English language resources | 18 | 16.5 | 26.1 | 21.2 | 18.3 |
| I like activities that I can be learn autonomously | 41 | 27.2 | 16.1 | 8.5 | 6.7 |
| I am capable of learning on my own | 15.2 | 21.9 | 27.6 | 18.1 | 16.7 |
| I have a better learning experience when I study alone | 28.1 | 27.1 | 21.4 | 12.6 | 10.8 |

Table 2: Language learning activities undertaken independently

When asked about the importance they attached to the role of the teacher in their learning experiences (see Table 3), more than half of the interviewees expressed a fear that their ability to learn English would be hampered by a teacher who could not explain the intricacies of the language properly. Having said that, most of the students agreed that they felt safer whenever a teacher was present; while almost half of them maintained they were only able to learn in a teacher-led environment. When it came to the question of teacher guidance, more than half of them felt this was a necessity. 24.7% admitted they occasionally only completed the tasks that counted toward their grades, although more than half of them stated that they not only complete these but others also. Additionally, the interview data revealed that there was a great reliance on the teacher; with over two thirds insisting they could not learn English without one.

| Statements | Always | Very often | Some times | Rarely | Never |
|---|--------|------------|------------|--------|-------|
| I have a fear of being unable to learn English if my teacher cannot explain things properly | 37.2 | 17.2 | 15 | 14.2 | 16.4 |
| I feel safe when the teacher is nearby | 40.5 | 21.9 | 19.7 | 11.5 | 6.4 |
| I feel unable to learn English without the help of a teacher | 28.8 | 21.5 | 15.4 | 15.7 | 18.6 |
| I believe that my teacher's guidance is essential | 39.3 | 23.6 | 18.4 | 14.2 | 4.5 |
| I only complete tasks that the teacher is meant to grade | 11 | 8.5 | 24.7 | 25.2 | 30.6 |

Table 3: The importance of the teacher's role within the learning environment

As the results illustrate, the students were very clear about the role played by the teacher and the importance of proper explanations in the language-learning classroom. It was also clear, as mentioned previously, that the majority of the students were not keen on learning English in isolation. In actuality, several of the students relied heavily on the teacher when it came to familiarising themselves with the finer details of the language, which suggests that they consider these tasks to be the responsibility of the teacher.

It was noticed that during the interviews eleven of the respondents stated that they believed the responsibility for learning lay with students, which suggests that the students are aware that they should adopt a proactive attitude to their learning. Despite this, however, there is still evidence of an over-reliance on their teachers and an inability to incorporate effective autonomous learning into their studies, possibly as a result of having been taught by conventional techniques.

Table 4 shows the interviewees' responses concerning activities used to facilitate language learning. The data indicates the majority of the students (at least for some of the time) think that group working is effective and popular. Indeed, most found they learned more by working with others than they did on their own. It is also interesting to find that many of the students expressed a desire to use resources outside of the classroom setting — a development that has the potential to improve their ability to learn autonomously.

The findings set out in Table 4 support these assertions. Here, it can be seen that two thirds of the interviewees expressed a preference for working in groups as they not only found it a more enjoyable way to work but felt they could learn more collaboratively. Importantly, however, a small but significant number said they preferred working individually as the way they learned and the pace at which they did it differed from their fellow students.

| statements | Always | Very often | Some times | Rarely | Never |
|---|--------|------------|------------|--------|-------|
| I like working in groups | 28.8 | 20.5 | 22.4 | 13.8 | 14.5 |
| I would like to use resources outside of the classroom | 35.4 | 24.4 | 18.5 | 10.2 | 11.5 |
| I prefer to read and listen when I am not in the classroom | 25.4 | 20.6 | 26.8 | 13.7 | 13.5 |
| I find working with friends more useful than studying on my own | 25.8 | 19.5 | 21.5 | 20.1 | 13.1 |

Table 4: Language learning resources and tasks

When the students were questioned about participating in the decision-making process within the classroom, most expressed a desire to share (for some of the time) responsibility for what would be covered in their lessons (see Table 5). They were less keen to be involved with regard to the lesson's content, however. Indeed, the survey revealed four main attitudes concerning the selection of the lesson's content. Five interviewees thought that the teacher alone should decide what the lesson content should be because they were more knowledgeable than the students. Four respondents displayed a more autonomous stance and while they still felt it was the teacher's responsibility to decide on the content, they believed the students should be consulted on how the lesson proceeded. Another four wanted to decide themselves about what to include in the lesson so that they would only have to learn what they needed or wanted to, which is an approach that can lead to effective learning outcomes. Finally, a remaining two students stated that although they wanted to be included in the decision-making process they did not feel their English was good enough. This suggests that they regard a poor standard of English as an obstacle to them making informed decisions about lesson content.

| Statements | Always | Very often | Some times | Rarely | Never |
|---|--------|------------|------------|--------|-------|
| I would like to be more involved in deciding what will be covered in the lesson | 30.7 | 27.4 | 26.3 | 11.4 | 4.2 |
| I would like to share in the decision-making about lesson content | 7.3 | 9.2 | 23.3 | 29.8 | 30.4 |

Table 5: Decision-making and responsibility with regard to lesson content

Table 6 illustrates the relationship that exists between the notions of assessment and motivation, with the results showing that the majority of the students surveyed did not study solely when they knew their work was going to be graded. In fact, the answers given by almost two thirds of the interviewees suggested they continued to study even after achieving a good exam result.

| Questions | Always | Very often | Some times | Rarely | Never |
|--|--------|------------|------------|--------|-------|
| I am not motivated to study topics if I achieve a high mark | 6.1 | 10.5 | 21.4 | 22.2 | 39.8 |
| I learn English when I know there is an exam | 12.2 | 11.7 | 29.4 | 24.2 | 22.5 |
| I only complete exercises if the teacher is going to mark the work | 15.2 | 13.4 | 21.3 | 23.5 | 26.6 |

Table 6: The connection between assessment and student motivation

The answers to questions about the interviewees' interest in their target language's culture detailed in Table 7 below indicate that the students had very little motivation to investigate the culture of the language they were learning. Contrarily, though, they did show greater interest in asking questions about lifestyles etc. of people who had lived abroad. This curiosity was also apparent during the interview process where it was noticed that the students became very attentive when the target language's culture was being discussed.

| Questions | Always | Very often | Some times | Rarely | Never |
|---|--------|------------|------------|--------|-------|
| I am interested in researching the culture of the target language I am studying | 10.4 | 7.7 | 25.9 | 27.7 | 28.3 |
| I inquire about the lifestyle etc. of other cultures whenever I meet someone who has lived abroad | 28.4 | 23.3 | 17.6 | 16.3 | 14.4 |

Table 7: Levels of interest in the target language's culture

Conclusion

“Whatever your pupil knows, he should not know because you have told him, but because he has grasped it himself.” This quote by J.J. Rousseau (1712–1778) accords well with the results documented in this study in so far as the majority of the participating students believed that with regard to them learning English as a foreign language they did indeed engage in autonomous learning activities both inside and outside the classroom albeit to a greater or lesser extent. More significantly, perhaps, the students also indicated they were prepared to take responsibility for their own learning progression. With this in mind, it is important that teachers recognise their role in encouraging their students to understand and work things out by themselves. Creating learner-centred lessons and teaching practices that allow students to share in the decision-making processes that affect their learning is a crucial step toward this goal.

In addition, this study's findings suggest that curriculum designers and teachers should be encouraged to do more to inspire their students so that they take an active part in making decisions about their learning objectives, which would go a long way to ensuring their learning experiences were positive ones. In the shorter term, however, every opportunity to further integrate a culture of autonomy into the foreign language-learning curriculum should be seized.

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پوخته

پروژهی ئۆتۆنۆمی (سەربەخۆیی) فیڤرخواز، که به هۆیهوه خویندکار بەرپرسیاریهتی کهسی و کۆنترۆلی پروسەیی فیڤربون دەگریته ئەستۆ، چەمکیکی نوێ و نەناسراوه بۆ زوربەیی ئەو فیڤرخوازانەیی که به شیوازیکی تەقلیدی فیڤری زمان کراون. بۆیه، ئامانجی سەرەکی توێژینهوهکه لیکۆلینهوهیه له راو بۆچونی فیڤرخوازان له سەر فیڤربونی سەربەخۆ، به تاییهت ئەوانهیی که ئینگلیزی وهک زمانیکی بیانی دهخوینن. ئەو فیڤرخوازانەیی ئاماده بون بهشداریی لهم توێژینهوهیهدا بکهن بریتین له فیڤرخوازانێ پۆلی دوازهیی ئامادهیی له هەریمی کوردستانی عێراق. سەرەرای ئامانجی سەرەکی، توێژینهوهکه لهو فاکتهرانەشی کۆلیوهتهوه که بونهته هۆی ئەوهی چۆن فیڤرخوازان مهیلیان به لای زیاتر خۆ ئاراستهکردن له خویندنهکهیان زیاد دهکات، رێژهی ئەو کاتانهی له دهرهوهی پۆل (جگه له ئهرکی مائهوه) چهنده که به شیوهیهکی سەربەخۆ بۆ فیڤربونی زمان تەرخانی دهکەن، تا چهند رۆلی مامۆستا کاریگەرە، ئەو چالاکیانه چین که بۆ فیڤربونی زمان بەردهستن، چۆن ناوهڕۆکی وانه ههڵدەبژێردریت، پهیوهندی نیوان هاندان و ههڵسهنگاندن چیه، ئارهزوی فیڤرخوازان بۆ شارەزایی پهیداکردن لهسەر کهلتوری ئەو زمانهیی که دهیانهویت فیڤری ببن له چ ناستیکدايه. سەرەرای ئەوانهش، توێژینهوهکه لهو چالاکیانهشی کۆلیوهتهوه که فیڤرخوازان له ناوهوهو دهرهوهی پۆل بهشداریی تیدا دهکەن ههروهها رهچاوکردنی ئەو چالاکیانه بۆ دلتیا بون لهوهی که تا چهند پهیوهنیان به چوارچیوهی سەربەخۆیی فیڤرخوازهوه ههیه.

Abstrait

L'idée d'autonomie de l'apprenant, de sorte que l'apprenant prend personnellement la responsabilité et le contrôle du processus d'apprentissage, est un concept pas familier pour de nombreux étudiants habitués à être enseignés de manière traditionnelle. Le but de cette étude est donc d'examiner les perceptions et les attitudes des élèves en ce qui concerne l'apprentissage autonome, en particulier ceux qui étudient l'anglais comme une langue étrangère. Les étudiants qui ont accepté de participer sont dans la 12e année de l'école secondaire et proviennent de la région du Kurdistan irakien. En plus de son objectif principal, l'étude a porté sur des facteurs tels que la façon inclinée les élèves sont à l'idée d'une plus grande auto-direction dans leurs études; le montant de l'apprentissage autonome des langues qu'ils entreprennent en dehors de la salle de classe (à l'exclusion des devoirs); quelle influence le rôle de l'enseignant est; quelle langue les activités d'apprentissage sont offerts; la façon dont le contenu de la leçon est choisie; le lien entre la motivation et l'évaluation; et le niveau d'intérêt il y a à savoir sur la culture de la langue cible. De plus, l'étude a examiné les activités des élèves participent à (à l'intérieur et à l'extérieur de la salle de classe) et d'examiner comment ceux-ci se rapportent au cadre de l'autonomie de l'apprenant.