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(eds.)

Promoting Learner Autonomy in Higher Education



South East European University

PH Zug

Pädagogische Hochschule Zug

Promoting Learner Autonomy in Higher Education

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Preface

Over the last ten years the South East European University (SEEU) in Tetovo, Macedonia, and the University of Teacher Education in Zug (PHZG – formerly PHZ Zug), Switzerland, have established and continue to maintain a fruitful cooperation in student exchange. The Swiss foundation “education 21” has been supporting cooperation between teacher training institutions in Switzerland and countries in eastern and southern countries since 2010, with the aim of developing global understanding and sustainability in education. SEEU and PHZG have seen this programme as a chance to deepen their partnership by conducting a joint research project in the field of learner autonomy, resulting in the current publication: *Learner Autonomy in Higher Education. An International Conference at South East European University in Tetovo, Macedonia, in cooperation with the University of Teacher Education in Zug, Switzerland.*

Learner autonomy is an important and widely discussed field of learning, relevant not only in the context of primary and secondary schools, but also for teaching at the university level. It goes without saying that this issue is of particular importance for teacher training.

As the project-leaders were language department professors (SEEU: Prof. Dr. Gezim Xhaferi and Assoc. Prof. Dr. Brikena Xhaferi; PHZG: Dr. Michelle Waldispühl and Prof. Dr. Brigit Eriksson), the project focused on language learning. The aim was to collect the various understanding and beliefs of, as well as the attitudes towards forms and concepts of self-regulated learning among students and faculty members at both partner institutions. One of the main objectives was to investigate the amount of learner autonomy given to the students at each institute. Additionally, we sought to understand and reflect upon different learning cultures in the context of learner autonomy. The collected data will facilitate our understanding of the

actions and *measures* required for improving teaching methodologies in order to optimize learning.

In November 2013 the project-leaders hosted an international conference in Tetovo, Macedonia, in order to discuss their work with researchers working in similar fields. The conference was well attended. Many experts – mainly from Eastern Europe – shared their insights in and experiences of learner autonomy in language learning. It is a pleasure to present participants' contributions in these proceedings.

Books do not write themselves – a great deal of commitment is required. I would first like to thank the editors of this book: Brikena Xhaferi, Gezim Xhaferi, and Michelle Waldispühl. Without their great commitment, neither the project, nor the conference, nor the book would have been possible. Special thanks go to the authors of the collected articles, who not only presented their work at the conference but also contributed to this book. SEEU also deserves a big thank-you for their financial support of this publication.

We hope this publication provides an impetus for further development of autonomous learning at teacher training institutes.

Zug, 20.2.2015

Brigit Eriksson, Rector of PHZG

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SEEU and PHZ

Students' and teachers' beliefs about Learner Autonomy at SEEU Tetovo, Macedonia and PH Zug, Switzerland: A comparative study

Abstract

In this paper, we present the results of a questionnaire survey on beliefs about Learner Autonomy (LA) and practices in language learning and teaching conducted among students and teachers at SEEU Tetovo and PH Zug. In Tetovo, 75 students enrolled in the BA studies, and 9 language teachers participated in the questionnaire survey. In Zug, there were 64 students enrolled in the second year of BA studies, and 3 language teachers included in the study.

The questionnaires are adapted versions of Borg & Al-Busaidi (2012) questionnaire who investigated English teachers' beliefs and practices of Learner Autonomy at the university language centre in Oman. While comparing teachers' beliefs on LA, the results show that the psychological concept of LA, such as monitoring and reflecting on one's learning, is perceived to be the most important one as well as the concept of the relationship of LA to the effectiveness in language learning is dominant. Regarding the students' beliefs, both groups of learners, in Zug and Tetovo, believe that LA is not learning without a teacher nevertheless, significant difference is found in student responses regarding the learner-centred environment and in the actual perception of how much autonomy the students are given at their respective university.

One of the main conclusion concerning practices of LA is that at both universities there is potential in taking students' educational background into account. Teachers in Zug can generally act on the assumption that students bring a fair amount of autonomy and

should therefore minimize compulsory classroom attendance, give the students more options in how, where, and when to achieve the course's goals, choose topics, amount of homework, pace and material and provide them, the students, with more opportunities for self-organized-learning. Teachers in Tetovo, on the other hand, should take more responsibility to encourage students to work more autonomously, guide them how to plan their learning, and give them more opportunities for creative work.

1. Introduction

1.1 Background of the study

The University of Teacher Education in Zug (Switzerland) and the South East European University in Tetovo (Macedonia) have signed a *cooperation* agreement program for student exchange in 2005. The main aim of the project was the student exchange of two institutions where the students have an opportunity to visit primary schools in Switzerland and Macedonia. The program has been very successful and useful for the students. The students gain an interesting experience because they can learn more about the education system in Switzerland and Macedonia, respectively, get familiar with teaching methods used in both countries, get acquainted with cultures in these two multilingual countries, and above all learn about the language acquisition situation.

As part of this cooperation, a joint research project on Learner Autonomy (LA) was developed. We believe that both institutions will benefit from the investigation of LA in the way that it will improve student learning and raise teachers' awareness of their role in improving LA. The study shall particularly profit from the comparative perspective of the two institutions and help to identify differences and similarities in language learning, and teachers' and learners' views of LA in institutions of Higher education.

The main purpose of the study was to identify teachers' and students' beliefs about the concept of learner autonomy in Higher education, and to investigate how much autonomy is given to students at Zug and SEEU. The study also provides answers about ideas which can encourage students to work more autonomously. Those ideas

include: choosing the course topics, the amount of homework given, pace and materials provided to the students, and opportunities given for self-organized-learning.

1.2 Learner Autonomy

1.2.1 History of the concept Learner Autonomy

The concept of learner autonomy was first introduced by Henry Holec (1981). Nowadays, there are many definitions introduced taking into consideration the teaching/learning context. The most-known definition used in the literature is that learner autonomy means the ability to take charge of one's own learning (Holec, 1981), 'Autonomy is essentially a matter of the learner's psychological relation to the process and content of learning' (Little, 1991:2), 'Autonomy is a situation in which the learner is totally responsible for all the decisions concerned with his [or her] learning and the implementation of those decisions.' (Dickinson, 1987) and 'Autonomy is a recognition of the rights of learners within educational systems.' (Benson, 1997).

In the field of second and foreign language teaching and learning, as the theory and practice of language teaching enters a new century, "the importance of helping students become more autonomous in their learning has become a more prominent theme" (Benson, 2000 cited in Dafei 2007:3). Despite the fact that the concept learner autonomy has been used for three decades now, the empirical studies on what makes autonomous learning materials effective are scarce (Ellis & Sinclair, 1989; Lee 1996, p.167, cf. Wenden 1987b, 1991a, Oxford 1990b cited in Dafei, 2007: 3).

To define "learner autonomy" and to provide a clear notion of an autonomous learner is a difficult task. The field is wide and there is no clear-cut definition of what learner autonomy means both theoretically and practically. In recent years there has been the tendency to define learner autonomy *ex negativo* (Little 1991: 3–5 comments on 'what learner autonomy is not') and, in consequence, various kinds of learner autonomy have been differentiated to break complexity (Benson 2011).

Little's (*ibid.*) list reacts on an earlier misconception of learner

autonomy. The concept was misunderstood as a method of 'self-instruction' meaning to learn without a teacher outside of the classroom (such as self-accessed learning, computer-based learning, learning at home) (cf. Benson 2008: 23). In such a narrow concept of an 'autonomous learner setting' the teacher's role is rather peripheral or even insignificant. Little (ibid.) emphasizes, however, that learner autonomy not only refers to situations where students are given freedom in their learning process, but also includes the psychological aspect of the students' capacity to organize and control their learning.

Benson (1997, 2011:58-64) elaborates the concept defining three various kinds of learner autonomy in language learning (technical, psychological and political) which he relates to different aspects of control (learning management, cognitive processing, learning content). Following this concept, autonomous learning strategies are part of the teacher's instruction goals inside the classroom likewise teacher and students discuss and "co-create optimal conditions for the exercise of their autonomy" (cf. Smith 2003: 131).

1.2.1 Seven concepts of Learner Autonomy

Based on Borg and Al-Busaidi's (2012) theoretical background for their questionnaire and with reference to other relevant literature mentioned above (Benson 2011, Little 1991 and 1999), we defined seven theoretical concepts for learner autonomy as a framework for our own study.¹ Ten concepts served as a starting point, brought forward by Borg and Al-Busaidi (2012:10). To render beliefs about learner autonomy, they distinguished the following concepts:

- 1) Technical perspectives on learner autonomy
- 2) Psychological perspectives on learner autonomy
- 3) Social perspectives on learner autonomy
- 4) Political perspectives on learner autonomy
- 5) The role of the teacher in learner autonomy

¹ We refer to these seven concepts in the part on beliefs about learner autonomy in our questionnaires (see below).

- 6) The relevance of learner autonomy to diverse cultural contexts
- 7) Age and learner autonomy
- 8) Language proficiency and learner autonomy
- 9) The implication of learner autonomy for teaching methodology
- 10) The relationship of learner autonomy to effective language learning.

These concepts cover different theoretical aspects of learner autonomy and cannot be seen on the same level (cf. *ibid.*). The technical concept focuses on the "when," "where," and "how" of learning (as an aspect of learning management). It involves strategies of self-management, such as having learning agendas (planning and organizing the learning,) and keeping records of one's own learning progress (evaluation of learning) as well as other both within, and out-of-classroom learning strategies. The psychological dimension of learner autonomy relates to Little's (1991: 4) definition that "autonomy is a *capacity* – for detachment, critical reflection, decision-making, and independent action. [...] The capacity for autonomy will be displayed both in the way the learner learns and in the way he or she transfers what has been learned to wider contexts". Benson (2011:100-112) subgroups psychological aspects in "attention" – which refers to the capacity of directing and consciously focusing attention to learning contents – "reflection" (of one's learning process, progress and practices,) and "metacognitive knowledge". The social perspective involves that learners are able to negotiate learning content, goals, purposes and resources with others (Benson *ibid.*: 60). Following Benson (*ibid.*: 62f., 112-116) concept 4 focuses on the learning content, i.e. the "what" and "why" of language learning, being a sub-aspect of learning management. It relates to power relationships within institutions and classrooms as well as actions of commitment to taking control of one's own learning (*ibid.*: 60f.).

In contrast to the named components of the definition of learner autonomy, concepts 6-8 involve possible prerequisites a student (and/or its cultural context) brings to facilitate learner autonomy. Concepts 5 and 9, then, are didactic and pedagogic consequences for the teacher and her/his teaching, and with concept 10 we have a possible result from already acquired and conducted autonomous

learning processes.

With regard to our own study, we want to base our research on technical, psychological, and methodological concepts and, therefore, exclude additional variables concerning the personal background of learners (concepts 7 and 8). Furthermore, we joined concepts 5 and 9 since they both involve the teachers' role. As a consequence, the following seven concepts remain:

- 1) Technical perspectives on learner autonomy
- 2) Psychological perspectives on learner autonomy
- 3) Social perspectives on learner autonomy
- 4) Political perspectives on learner autonomy
- 5) The role of the teacher in learner autonomy
- 6) The relevance of learner autonomy to diverse cultural contexts
- 7) The relationship of learner autonomy to effective language learning.

Even if the concepts are more clearly divided in this way, the different aspects still operate on various levels. They should, however, not be seen as theoretical components of a new definition of learner autonomy, but rather as different perspectives on the subject for heuristic purposes.

1.3 Teacher's role and teachers' beliefs

According to a psychological definition of learner autonomy, i.e. seeing the concept basically as an ability of the students to take responsibility for their learning, to have their own commitment to the learning content, and to monitor their learning process. The teacher's role is rather that of a manager, facilitator and agitator for self-dependent learning than an instructor of content knowledge. Following Voller's (1997: 102) summary of previous literature Benson (2011: 186f.) lists concrete functions and qualities of a teacher distinguishing between 'technical' and 'psycho-social' support for students. For the former he lists support for the students' planning and carrying out of their language learning (such as the setting of objectives, selection selection of material, organisation of interactions), their evaluation process (monitoring, peer- and self-assessment) and acquisition of learning strategies and learning

awareness. By 'psycho-social' support he means facilitator's qualities in general, and both motivational as well as meta-cognitive practices in particular. The teacher's role is generally seen as an important factor for autonomous learning. As a crucial term for successful 'teaching of learner autonomy' it is stated in several publications (cf. e.g. Dam 2003) that teachers have to believe in their students' ability to manage their own studies and as a consequence also need to relinquish responsibility.

Although we find some consensus among researchers on the understanding of learner autonomy, Borg and Al-Busaidi (2012: 5) note that the same is not the case with in-service teachers' beliefs about learner autonomy. Only little research has been conducted on this aspect and there is some evidence that older misconceptions mentioned by Little (see above) might persist among teachers (ibid.). In their reference of older studies they note the evidence that teachers generally have a positive attitude to theoretical aspects of learner autonomy, such as situational classroom management and learning strategies, but utter doubts when it comes to practical realization.

According to Borg and Al-Busaidi (ibid.: 7) none of the studies provided a satisfying method for their own study on English teachers' beliefs and practices at the Sultan Qaboos University in Oman. As a consequence, they developed their own questionnaire based on the consulted studies (see above) and Benson (2007)'s theoretical considerations.² In addition, they conducted semi-structured interviews with volunteering teachers who filled the questionnaire. For our study we use most parts of Borg and Al-Busaidi's questionnaire and will refer to it in detail below.

1.4 Students' beliefs

Learner autonomy is becoming increasingly popular nowadays especially in the learner-centred classroom where the learner is

² For a detailed outline of the questionnaire's development see Borg and Al-Busaidi (2012: 9-11).

supposed to take the responsibility for his own learning. In addition to this, "Learner autonomy is based on the idea that if students are involved in decision making processes regarding their own language competence, they are likely to be more enthusiastic about learning" (Littlejohn, 1985 in Balçakanlı, 2010: 90).

However, "second language learners are not always conscious of their individual learning styles, but all of them have strong beliefs and opinions of how their instruction should be delivered." In language learning these beliefs are shaped not only by the educational environment but also by family and social values" (Liu 2012:726). For this reason, the teacher has a very important role in promoting learner autonomy acting as a facilitator, organizing or helping students with different resources, and motivation.

In addition to this, Benson (2007: 26) mentions a very good way in promoting LA as a self-access centre, which functions as a part of many higher education institutions. "Self-access is an approach to learning not an approach to teaching, Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL), Distance learning, Tandem learning, Out-of-class-learning and Self-instruction." He strongly believes there can be several such modes of practice, for example, self-study, library study, group learning and so on.

A similar study conducted was conducted with a group of Spanish students learning English in Britain. The study used a 45-item questionnaire and the results showed that students took responsibility for their own learning and enjoyed some independent work. In addition to this, they also exhibited a high degree of teacher independence and felt that they could not improve without a class. Based on the overall study results it can be concluded that Spanish students value highly the teacher - class framework for language learning.

Another study was conducted with Chinese students and the main aim was to investigate Chinese students attitudes towards LA. The instrument used in this study was a student questionnaire which contained 24 questions. It was divided into four parts: the first part dealt with the students attitudes and perception toward language learning, the second and third part dealt with teachers and learners roles, and the last part dealt with their perception of their capa-

bility in language learning. The overall results showed that students have positive attitudes towards LA, they have a general desire to be involved in the language learning process and believe in the value of effort and self discipline.

1.5 Intercultural perspectives on Learner Autonomy

Most prominently 'culture' is related to an ethnic or national idea. With regard to learner autonomy the issue of 'culture' was raised because the concept was predominantly promoted by Western researchers and some scholars uttered doubts on its practicability in non-Western contexts (Palfreyman 2003: 1). In his introduction to the proceedings on "Learner Autonomy Across Culture" Palfreyman (ibid.: 1f.) expands the notion of 'culture' by two more aspects: values and practices in different domains on one hand, such as the culture of a classroom or a school with their respective learning environments, and on a social dimension on the other hand, where an individual learner is opposed to a socially contextualised embedded learning environment. As a conclusion to their volume dealing with such cultural aspects in relation to learner autonomy, Smith (2003: 254-60) notes that the interpretations of what learner autonomy actually *is* are manifold both across 'cultures' and discourses. He, therefore, – and in addition to the great variety of cultural settings – claims researchers rather to focus on the purpose of autonomous learning in respective contexts ("what it is *for*"). With regard to the influence and significance of 'culture' in relation to learner autonomy, he states that cultural background can be both a resource and constraint as well as differ in its respective value. Furthermore, it turned out that for the notion of 'culture' and 'cultural' influence on learner autonomy professional and organizational preconceptions emerge stronger than 'national' or 'ethnic' contexts. The need and interest in promoting learner autonomy can differ not only across boards but also within different schools and learning environments.

The concept of 'culture' in our study is foremost related to place – we compare beliefs and practices about language learning of teachers and students from two different universities in an Eastern and a Western European country. The two universities not only

differ in place, but are also embedded in different learning contexts based on traditions in teaching and learning. These result from different traditional contexts related to location on one hand, but additionally base on study requirements and the embedding of language studies in the respective curricula. The notion of 'culture' in language learning and teaching, therefore, is expanded by ideas that might be linked to place, but additionally relate to educational goals and settings in an academic context.

At the University of Teacher Education in Zug students are formed to be general teachers for primary school after three years of BA-studies. They follow a fairly strict curriculum comprising teaching methodology and educational science in general and for eight subjects in particular (German, English or/and French, Mathematics, Science, PE, Art, Music). In addition they attend several courses of practical training in schools. Language courses only form a small part in the curriculum and serve as a basis for language competences with regard to future language teaching.

At the Faculty of Languages, Cultures and Communications at SEE University in Tetovo, students are trained to become teachers of a particular language subject in primary and secondary schools after completing their BA-studies. All courses offered at SEEU are related to teaching methodology, linguistics and literature whereas the English language is offered to all students of Faculty of Languages, Cultures and Communications (LCC). The modern discipline of communications is also well represented in the Faculty, and extensive course offerings for those interested in media studies, cultural relations, and political and social analysis are provided.

2. Research Method

2.1 Research questions

Following Borg & Al Busaidi (2012) a quantitative data selection method was used for the purpose of the study. The main advantage of this method is that the data obtained could be compared. On the other hand, the best way to get a reliable result is by involving more participants in the study.

The study aims to answer the following research questions:

- What does LA mean to the students and teachers in second / foreign language acquisition at SEEU Tetovo and PH Zug?
- How desirable and feasible do teachers at SEEU Tetovo and PH Zug feel it is to promote LA?
- In what aspects do teachers in Tetovo and Zug accord/differ?
- In what aspects do students in Tetovo and Zug accord/differ?

2.2 Participants

The participants of the study were 75 students enrolled in the BA-studies and 9 language teachers from Tetovo, and 64 students enrolled in the second year of BA-studies and 3 language teachers from Zug, University of Teacher Education. Students were both genders, male and female students with different nationalities.

2.3 Instruments

Teachers and students were surveyed by a questionnaire (see appendix).

The teachers' questionnaire is an adapted version of the questionnaire developed by Borg and Al-Busaidi (2012). It consists of four sections.

The first section aims at investigating the teachers' beliefs about learner autonomy. According to the above named seven theoretical concepts there are 30 items are given as choices in a Likert 5-point scale of agreement. As a consequence of Borg and Al-Busaidi's (2012) conclusion that the distribution of items to the various theoretical categories was not satisfying in their investigation, we adapted both the concepts (see above) and grouped the items as follows.³ The negatively coined items are marked by (-).

³ Borg and Al-Busaidi (2012) unfortunately do not employ their code underlying the categorization of the questions. The here given distribution is based on our own judgement.

<i>Concept</i>	<i>Items</i>
1: Technical perspectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Independent study in the library is an activity which develops learner autonomy. • Autonomy can develop most effectively through learning outside the classroom. • Learner autonomy is promoted by independent work in a self-access centre. • Out-of-class tasks which require learners to use the internet promote learner autonomy. • Learner autonomy is promoted when learners complete a task within their individual timeframe.⁴
2: Psychological perspectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learning how to learn is the key to developing learner autonomy. • Motivated language learners are more likely to develop learner autonomy than learners who are not motivated. • To become autonomous, learners need to develop the ability to evaluate their own learning.
3: Social perspectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learner autonomy is promoted through regular opportunities for learners to complete tasks alone. (-) • Learner autonomy is promoted through activities which give learners opportunities to learn from each other. • Learner autonomy is promoted by activities that encourage learners to work together. • Co-operative group work activities support the development of learner autonomy.

⁴ The last two items do not occur in Borg and Al-Busaidi's (2012) questionnaire but are our additions in order to even cover the aspect of the "when and how long" of the technical perspective on learner autonomy.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learning to work alone is central to the development of learner autonomy. (-)
<p>4: Political perspectives</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Autonomy means that learners can make choices about how they learn. • Involving learners in decisions about what to learn promotes learner autonomy. • Learner autonomy is promoted when learners have some choice in the kinds of activities they do. • Learner autonomy is promoted when learners are free to decide how their learning will be assessed. • Learner autonomy is promoted when learners can choose their own learning materials.
<p>5: The role of the teacher</p>	
<p>Aspect A: Learning without a teacher</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learner autonomy means learning without a teacher. • Learner autonomy cannot develop without the help of the teacher. (-) • The teacher has an important role to play in supporting learner autonomy. (-) • Learner autonomy requires the learner to be totally independent of the teacher.
<p>Aspect B: Learner-centred classroom</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learner-centred classrooms provide ideal conditions for developing learner autonomy. • Learner autonomy cannot be promoted in teacher-centred classrooms. • Learner autonomy implies a rejection of traditional teacher-led ways of teaching.
<p>6: The connectivity of learner autonomy</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learner autonomy is a concept which is suited to the teaching culture at my university. • Learner autonomy can be achieved by

to diverse cultural contexts	learners of all universities around the world. ⁵
7: The relationship of learner autonomy to effective language learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Individuals who lack autonomy are not likely to be effective language learners. (-) • Learner autonomy allows language learners to learn more effectively than they otherwise would. • Learner autonomy has a positive effect on success as a language learner.

Table 1: Distribution of the questionnaire items to the theoretical concepts of learner autonomy

The second section addresses the desirability and feasibility of learner autonomy from the teachers' perspective and is taken as such from Borg and Al-Busaidi's (2012) study. Teachers are asked about their attitudes to the involvement of their students in their teaching on one hand, and to the ability of their learners in different skills of autonomous learning on the other hand. For both parts the desirability and the feasibility are assessed on a five-point scale.

The third section contains two open-ended questions about the teacher's general assessment of their students' autonomous learning skills, as well as their effort and practices to promote learner autonomy with their own teaching, and is likewise taken from Borg and Al-Busaidi (2012).

Section four assesses personal data like teaching experience, qualifications, nationality, gender and age.

The students' questionnaire also contains four sections. Section one corresponds directly to the first part of the teachers' questionnaire. The same 30 items are given as choices in a five-point Likert-scale. In the second section students are asked about their involvement in learning at university when it comes to decisions about

⁵ Borg & Al Busaidi's (2012: 88) items on the relevance of cultural contexts were adapted to meet the requirements of the above named aspects of 'culture'. We thank Bruno Leutwyler for his profound comments on this issue.

materials, goals, methods, assessment etc. They are given choices in a five-point scale ranging from “very weak” to “very strong.”

The third section contains two open-ended questions addressing the students' general assessment of the autonomy given by their teachers and their own skills for autonomous learning.

In the fourth section personal data and the students' linguistic biography is assessed.

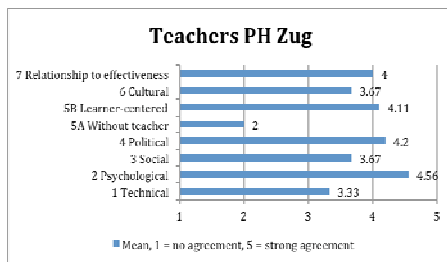
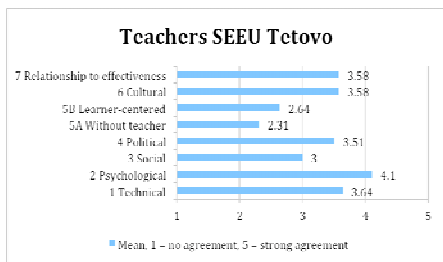
2.4 Procedure or the research

The total number of the participants was 139 students and 12 teachers of language studies from both institutions, SEEU Tetovo and University of Teacher Education Zug. Before completing the survey the students and teachers were informed about the research and they were then asked to complete the questionnaire. The teachers from both institutions were sent an invitation by email to fill in the questionnaire online in a web-based version. The teachers completed the questionnaire within a deadline set by the researchers. The students' questionnaires were administered in the classrooms.

3. Results and discussion

3.1 Teachers' beliefs and practices

Research question: What does Learner Autonomy mean to the teachers in Tetovo and Zug?



Figures 1-2: What learner autonomy means to teachers in Tetovo and Zug

Figures 1–2 show what teachers at SEEU Tetovo and PH Zug believe about learner autonomy. The graphs display the mean for agreement for the respective concept of learner autonomy. The

smaller the mean the less agreement the teachers have for a certain concept being crucial for learner autonomy.

Comparing the two groups of teachers there are some clear correspondences in what they believe about learner autonomy. In both groups the psychological concept of learner autonomy – i.e. “learning how to learn” – is perceived to be the most important one. Similarly, the concept of the relationship of learner autonomy to the effectiveness in language learning is dominant. Furthermore, both groups also believe learner autonomy does not mean learning without a teacher.

In Tetovo, the technical dimension is more valued than the political one, whereas in Zug, the political one is more valued than the technical one.

In Zug teachers feel that learner-centered classroom clearly promotes learner autonomy, whereas the majority of the teachers in Tetovo disagree to this statement.

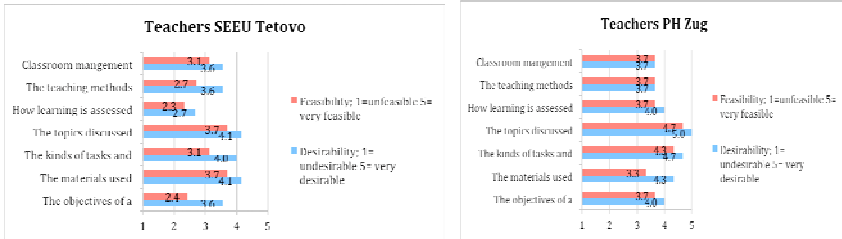
Lastly, both groups approve that learner autonomy can be achieved by learners of all universities around the world.

Research question: How desirable and feasible do teachers at SEEU Tetovo and PH Zug feel it is to promote Learner Autonomy?

In both groups it is most desirable to involve students in decisions about the topics discussed in classroom, the kinds of tasks and activities they do, the materials used in the classroom and the objectives of a course (cf. figures 3–4). To a smaller extent, both groups also consider student involvement is desirable in classroom management and teaching methods used. The major difference is in how the teachers feel about student involvement in assessment: the teachers in Zug think it is more desirable while the teachers at SEEU Tetovo think the opposite.

Striking for both groups is that the rate for desirability is either the same or – in the more significant cases – higher than for feasibility. Comparing the two groups, the general trend to great differences between desirability and feasibility of student involvement in decision-making is more significant in Tetovo than in Zug. The latter group of teachers feel that it is more feasible to get students involved in their institution, while the teachers in Tetovo feel the opposite.

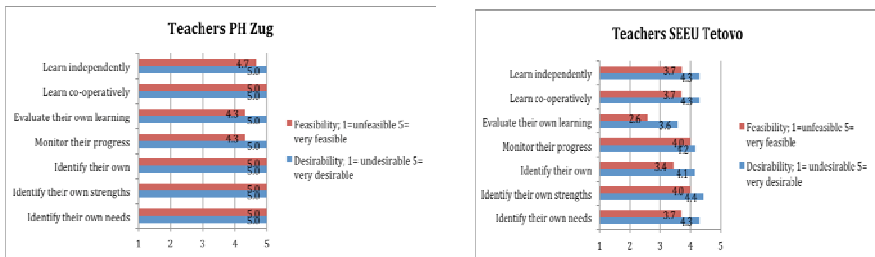
In Zug the less feasible aspect is involvement in the decisions for materials used, whereas in Tetovo teachers do not consider student involvement in decisions about assessment and objectives of a course a feasible matter.



Figures 3–4: Desirability and feasibility of student involvement in decision-making

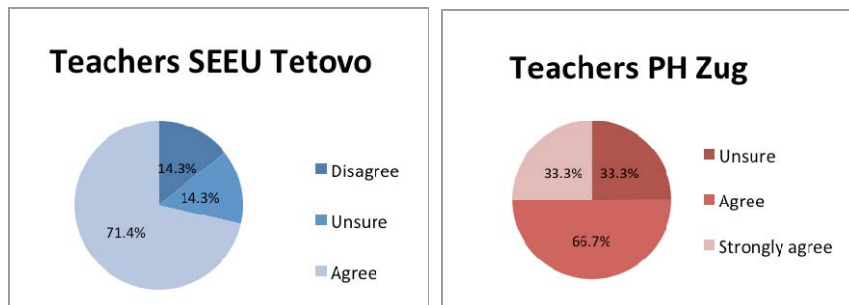
When it comes to the desirability and feasibility of learning skills in students (cf. figures 5–6) there is a highly remarkable differences between the beliefs of teachers at the PH Zug and the teachers at SEEU Tetovo. In Zug there is a total desire of all aspects mentioned, such as learn independently, co-operatively, evaluation and monitoring of learning, identifying strengths and weaknesses as well as their own learning needs. In addition to this, feasibility is very highly rated for all aspects.

The teachers at SEEU Tetovo, however, have a lower expectation regarding desirability for all these aspects. Similarly, they feel that feasibility of the abovementioned concepts are less feasible at their university. Among all the aspects, the evaluation of the students' own learning is the least feasible skill according to their view.



Figures 5–6: Desirability and feasibility of learning to learn skills in students

Research question: To what extent do the teachers feel their learners are autonomous?



Figures 7–8: Teachers' beliefs about their learners' autonomy

Teachers at PH Zug agree or even strongly agree with the statement that their students in general have a fair degree of learner autonomy (cf. figures 7–8). In Tetovo the majority of the teachers likewise believes their students to be autonomous, but in contrast to Zug there is also disagreement to this statement.

Given the opportunity to comment on this aspect freely, the teachers in Tetovo observed two main points. On one hand, there are 3 teachers who note that there is a lack of experience in autonomous learning when students enter university. One teacher writes:

«[...] students tend to be 'spoon-fed' at school and are not always trained to think critically and explore questions independently.»

On the other hand, teachers state that it is not possible to make a general statement for all the students. There is a certain extend of differentiation in the degree of autonomy among students.

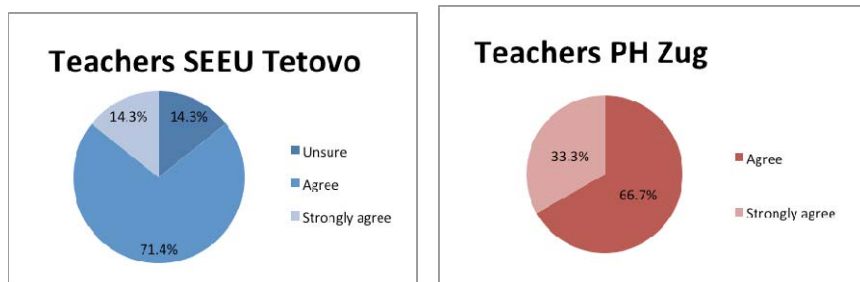
A similar statement is brought forward by a Zug teacher. Interestingly, he/she elaborates the statement mentioning characteristics of an autonomous learner to his/her understanding:

«There's a wide range in the degree of autonomy among my students. Some are sufficiently motivated and disciplined to have their own study plan and work independently outside of class to achieve

their goals, as well as to make specific requests of me for certain lesson topics, advice, text book use etc.

Other students really only expect to be 'spoon-fed' and seem to have to no self-initiated learning habits.» To this teacher learner autonomy is to a great extent based on the students' initiatives to both managing their own learning outside of class and getting involved in decision-making.

Research question: To what extend do teachers feel they promote learner autonomy?



Figures 9–10: Teachers' assessment of their own promotion of learner autonomy

Both groups of teachers agree to a very high degree that they promote learner autonomy in their teaching (cf. figures 9–10). The statements given the following-up open-ended question were manifold.

Comments of the teachers at SEEU Tetovo firstly concerned the role of the teacher which they characterised as an «*assistant*», «*guide*», «*motivator*» and a «*role model*» in fostering learner autonomy. Secondly, it is mentioned several times – in alignment with the statement about the beginner students' lack in autonomy (see above) – that assistance is needed and given especially in the first year. One teacher, however, expects the students to already bring autonomy and states: «*At this level, you can't transmit everything to them.*» Finally, there are a couple of activities and methods mentioned that promote learner autonomy in the opinion of the teachers at SEEU

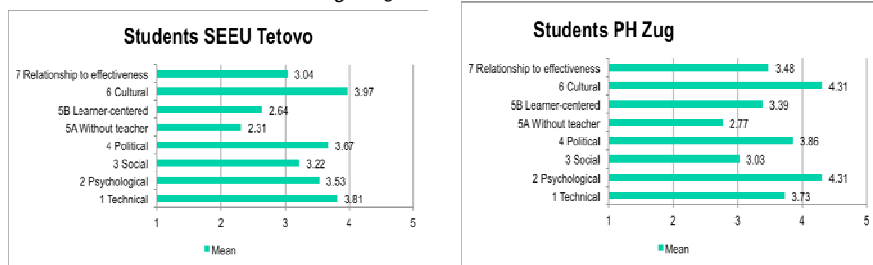
Tetovo. They refer to three different concepts of learner autonomy defined above: to the technical perspective (*development of students' IT skills, learning English online, expose them to a range of resources*), in a non-specific way to the social perspective (*tasks to work individually or in a group*) and to the political perspective (*asking for opinion to materials, working on project, assessment, learning styles, pace*).

Teachers at PH Zug have made three statements to the way they believe they promote learner autonomy. One teacher considers the encouragement of self-reflection one of his/her main tasks in fostering learner autonomy, whereas another mentions the involvement of students' into decision-making processes concerning *«lesson content, activities and, to an extent, assessment»*. Interestingly enough one teacher adds a comment that accredits the teacher the role of a controller: *«Students still need control to take it seriously.»*

Similarly to the SEEU Tetovo teachers' statements, the teachers at PH Zug refer to different concepts of learner autonomy. Whereas teachers in Tetovo include the technical, political and the social perspective, the teachers in Zug comments on the psychological and also on the political perspective. With regard to the role of the teacher, the participants from Tetovo mention mediating and facilitating characteristics. One teacher in Zug adds supervising /controlling to the teacher's tasks.

3.2 Students' beliefs and practices

Research question: What does Learner Autonomy mean to the students in Tetovo and Zug? Figures



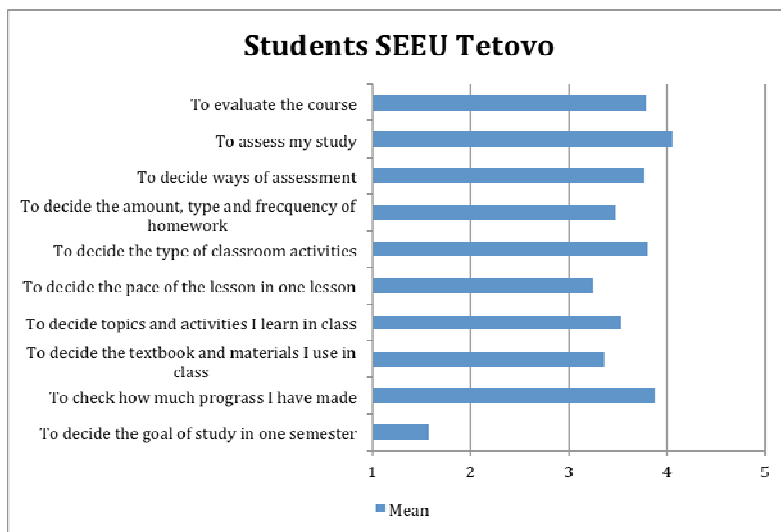
11–12: The meaning of LA to both groups of students

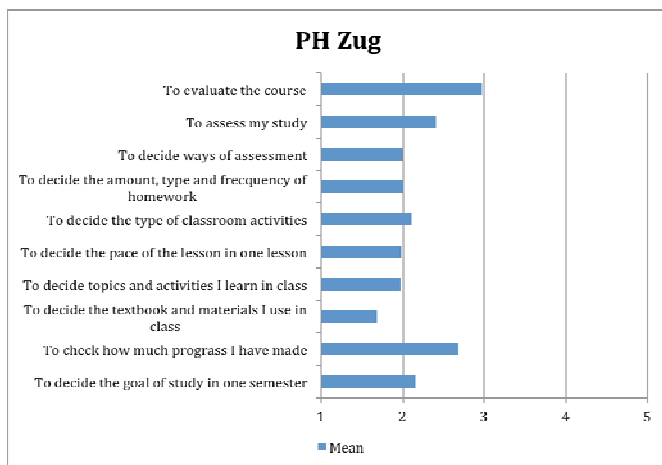
Figures 11 and 12 show, what Learner Autonomy means to the students in Tetovo and Zug. Analyzing the results, it can be seen that both groups of learners agree on the technical, political and cultural aspect but they mostly disagree on the psychological aspect. A common belief for both groups is that LA is not learning without a teacher. Nevertheless, concerning the concept of the relationship to effectiveness, it is more important for students in Zug than those in Tetovo. Regarding the learner-centred classroom, Zug students believe that it is very important, while students in Tetovo do not find it so important. Similar to the results of the teachers' survey, the teachers in Zug consider this aspect more important than teachers in Tetovo.

*Question on **Students' involvement**: To what degree do the students feel they are involved?*

1 = very little involvement

5 = very strong involvement

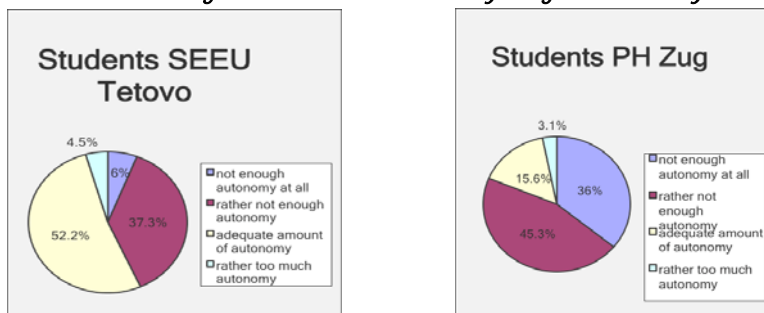




Figures 13–14: Students' involvement in the learning process

When it comes to the degree of learner involvement in the learning process, it seems that both groups of students in Tetovo and Zug agree that their involvement should be emphasized in course evaluation and in checking how much progress they made, which is stronger in comparison to the other aspects mentioned. Similarly, the student involvement from Tetovo is much stronger in comparison to those in Zug when it comes to deciding about the type of assessment, pace of learning activities and course topics. The main difference, though lies in deciding about the goals of the study where students from Zug are more involved than those in Tetovo.

Question: To what degree do the students feel they are given autonomy?



Figures 15–16: Students' beliefs about their own learner autonomy

Figures 15 and 16 show the students' perceptions of their own learner autonomy. Comparing the results of both groups it can be concluded that a majority of the students in Tetovo believe that they had adequate amount of autonomy nevertheless, around quarter percent of the students in Zug believe that they have adequate autonomy. The main difference is in the category of "not enough autonomy at all" where only a small percentage of students in Tetovo believe they don't have autonomy at all, while almost half of the students in Zug believe that they don't have learner autonomy. Only a small number of participants stated that they have rather too much autonomy. This means that students are not satisfied with the amount of autonomy given to them, therefore, they suggest different situations where they can be given autonomy. Given the opportunity to comment, students in Tetovo have given some interesting comments on the same question: 'To what degree do the students feel they are given autonomy?'

«I like being given opportunities about time, what way and planning of learning .»

«Not much autonomy given .»

« Courses strictly guided and structured by the teachers .»

Students in Zug on the other hand have other concerns such as:

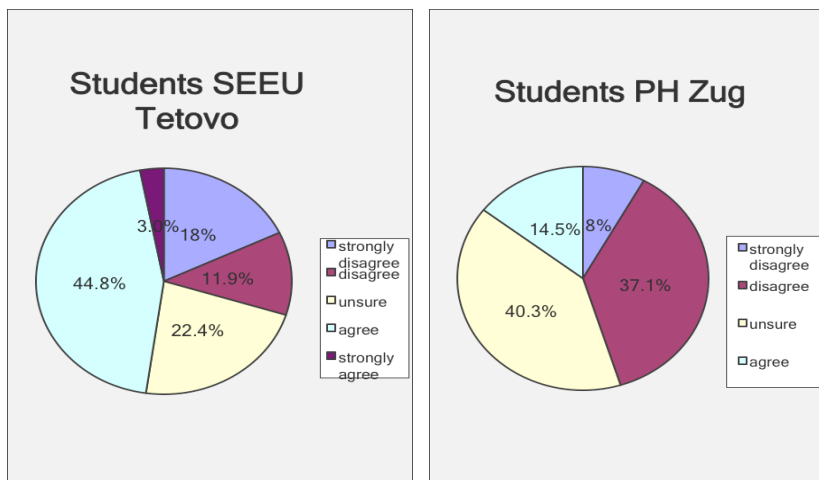
«Courses(/everything) clearly/strictly guided and structured by teachers.»

« A lot of compulsory attendance > no time for autonomous learning.»

« Constraint of curriculum: the whole semester is structured.»

The statements given by the students show that students prefer to have more autonomy in designing the courses and they wish it was less structured.

Question: Do the students feel to have a fair degree of autonomy?



Figures 17–18: Students' degree of learner autonomy

Analyzing figures 17 and 18, majority of the participants in Tetovo agree that they have a fair degree of autonomy, while in Zug only a small number of participants agree on this issue. It seems that students' degree of learner autonomy differs a lot in Tetovo and Zug. Also, comments given by the students in Tetovo and Zug differ a lot. These are some comments from both groups of students in Tetovo and Zug:

«Would like to have little more autonomy.»

«It is the teachers' responsibility to develop learner autonomy.»

«Wishes more autonomy for creativity.»

And, students from Zug have commented:

«Tasks, topics and textbooks are given.»

«Some subjects leave some choice others none.»

«Autonomy in whether or not you do your homework.»

The above given comments show that students definitely prefer to have more autonomy and they feel that teachers should promote it. One idea of promoting learner autonomy according to the participants is giving them the choice of their homework.

4. Conclusion and limitations of the study

Investigating teachers' and students' beliefs in promoting LA in contexts similar to Zug and Tetovo is very important because beliefs shape our success in life, and determine our future path. In fact, the concept of learner autonomy is rather new in Macedonia because language teachers themselves are not autonomous enough due to their traditional education. In Zug, teachers expect the students to bring a fair amount of autonomy to the classroom nevertheless, it is very important to teach our students how to learn independently and provide them with the necessary knowledge and awareness at the beginning of their studies. An additional crucial aspect to provide an autonomous classroom is how do the teachers perceive their own role. Teachers in Tetovo, on the other hand, should act as an «*assistant*», «*guide*», «*motivator*» and a «*role model*» in fostering learner autonomy, but for one teacher in Zug it is a «*controller*». Having this in mind, the teachers should reconsider their role in promoting learner autonomy and teach their learners how to learn.

According to the results obtained from the student questionnaire in Tetovo, the teachers should take more responsibility to encourage students to work more autonomously. Some of the ideas mentioned are that students can be guided on how to plan their own learning and they should be given more opportunities for creative work. In addition to this, another recommendation drawn from the study can be that teachers should increase learner-centered classroom in order to promote LA in Higher Education. Learner-centered classroom and LA are interrelated concepts and, therefore, teachers should help their learners to develop this skill. This is particularly important in an environment like Macedonia where the students were educated in a teacher-centered classroom. Another relevance of the results of the study is the importance of taking into consideration the level of students' autonomy when preparing the course programs. Consequently, if we as teachers aim to increase learner-centeredness, then the curriculum of the study should be constructed with the learner as its central focus.

One way to develop teachers' awareness of promoting LA is to organize workshops where teachers can exchange their views about it, and brainstorm some ideas of how it might work in both contexts. For this reason, we strongly recommend that we organize workshops based on the study results. The idea would be to include them as modules within the German Department at SEEU and Zug. Finally, it is strongly recommended that first year students should be taught methods of autonomous learning and encouraged more consciously in becoming autonomous learners. This can be achieved when institutions and teachers provide learners with knowledge of understanding themselves and their active role in learning, and the learning process in general as a means for continuing development.

We hope that the project findings are of interest to language teachers and students, as well as curriculum designers who plan to include LA in their curricula.

Regarding the limitations of the study we have faced, there are three noteworthy of this study, of which two lead back to the design of method and one is based on the theoretical reference framework. First, there is an interdependency of the different parts in the questionnaires, which might have had an impact on the participants' answers especially to the open-ended questions in section 3. Our intention was to find out what both teachers and students *think* what learner autonomy is. Hence, the participants were not given a definition before filling in the questionnaire. Answering the questions in sections 2 and 3, however, they might have based their judgements on a subjective, even vague conception they developed from the items in sections 1. One participant even expressed uncertainty mentioning that she/he cannot give an answer to the question "In general, I most often have a fair degree of learner autonomy" in section 3 since she/he was still not sure what learner autonomy means. Even if this should be considered in the judgement of the results to section 2 and 3, it was of minor limitation to our study because the statements to the open-ended questions are still valuable for qualitative evaluation. For a further survey this interdependency could be determined cross-listing the results from section 1 to those in sections 2 and 3.

A second limitation concerns the comparability of results with regard to the number of participants on each side. For the teachers' survey there were only three participants from the University of Teacher Education in Zug for nine from SEEU Tetovo. To take account of this problem we followed Borg & Al-Busaidi (2012) in comparing relative instead of absolute numbers.⁶

One last limitation concerns the theoretical framework as a general reference for the survey. The problem that there is no sound definition of 'learner autonomy' has already been mentioned in section 1.2.1 above. In our survey, section 1 implicitly gives aspects of a vague definition, which might have determined the participants ideas about what autonomy is. For a further survey on beliefs about learner autonomy it should be considered to give an open-ended question in the beginning, before a section determined by given items, where beliefs can be uttered freely, so that the results of the open-ended questions can be confronted with the pre-determined concepts coming to display in the section with given items.

⁶ The problems regarding effect size of the results may be neglected in this study since our results are discussed as such rather than as representative for a bigger group.

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Anžela Nikolovska, Blaze Koneski

The Role of Alternative Assessment in Developing Pre-service EFL Teachers' Teaching Skills and Fostering Learner Autonomy

Abstract

In contrast to traditional forms of assessment such as paper-and-pencil tests which reflect the transmission model of education, alternative assessments reflect an alternative view of the teaching and learning process according to which students acquire knowledge by constructing meaning through active and dynamic mental processes. Alternative assessments provide learners with the opportunity to construct information in an authentic context through meaningful activities that integrate language and content area skills and tap into learners' higher-order thinking skills.

The paper reports the results of a survey carried out among fourth-year pre-service EFL teachers at the English Department, Blaže Koneski Faculty of Philology, Ss. Cyril and Methodius University in Skopje. The purpose of the study was to explore pre-service teachers' beliefs about the role of the alternative assessments used to assess the development of their teaching skills. A subsidiary aim was to cast light on the effects of these assessments on promoting learner autonomy. The following assessment tasks were used: oral presentations, micro-teaching, observation diaries and classroom teaching. The findings reveal that students perceived these assessments as meaningful and relevant as well as having a great capacity in increasing their motivation and learning outcomes. The role of feedback and reflection in developing trainees' skills, the increased student engagement in learning, the individual and collaborative nature of the tasks as well as choosing the content of the tasks were some of the aspects of learner autonomy identified as outcomes of these learning-oriented assessments.

Key words: traditional, alternative, assessment, pre-service teacher training, learner autonomy

1. Introduction

The changing needs of the modern society have redefined the goals of education as well as teacher and learner roles. Learners are no longer considered as passive recipients of knowledge transmitted by teachers. Instead, a need has emerged to train learners for life-long learning by granting them the power to take charge of their own learning.

In line with the fact that assessment is a vital component of education, a demand has been created to modify assessment practices so as to reflect the holistic and integrative view of language learning (Hamayan 1995) according to which assessment should capture the interrelationship between all the aspects of language and the wide range of learner's skills and abilities. The need to overcome the shortcomings of traditional paper-and-pencil tests by making assessment more responsive to individual learners gave rise to innovative assessment procedures known as "alternative assessment".

According to Alderson and Banerjee (2001: 228):

"Alternative assessment is usually taken to mean assessment procedures which are less formal than traditional testing, which are gathered over a period of time, which are usually formative rather than summative in function, are often low-stakes in terms of consequences, and are claimed to have beneficial washback effects."

Alternative assessment is by definition authentic because it is based on activities that represent classroom and real-life settings. These two terms are often used interchangeably. These assessments are also known as performance-based assessments although some experts view performance-based assessment as a subcategory of alternative assessment (Valdez-Pierce 2002). Performance-based assessment (PBA) is "the completion of a task or activity which is assessed through the learner demonstrating an ability." (Cumming and Maxwell in Davison 2011: 63). Valdez-Pierce (2002) distinguishes between three types of PBAs:

a) Products - works produced by students which demonstrate their application of knowledge (writing samples, projects, portfolios)

b) Performances – demonstrations of application of knowledge and skills under the observation of the teacher (observations, oral reports, skits and role-plays, demonstrations, interviews and debates)

c) Process-oriented assessments – provide insight into student reasoning, motivation and use of learning strategies; they often engage students in monitoring learning and reflecting on learning (think-alouds, self-and peer-assessments, teacher-student conferences, learning logs).

Although alternative assessments may be time-consuming and difficult to administer and score, they have numerous advantages over traditional testing. (Valdez - Pierce 2002). Their primary goal is to enhance learning by linking assessment to instruction through the use of meaningful and engaging tasks which may call for integration of language and content area skills. In addition, they increase learners' motivation and confidence by showing what learners know and can do by tapping into learners' higher order thinking skills and catering for their individual needs. By providing feedback to learners on their strengths and weaknesses, these assessments enable learners to monitor and manage learning toward achieving learning goals. Raising awareness of language learning through feedback and reflection are important aspects of autonomous learning.

In view of the great multidimensional potential they possess, alternative assessments deserve special attention in any language instruction and teacher training context.

Alternative assessments in teacher training – a tool for fostering learner autonomy

The main aim of the study was to investigate pre-service EFL teachers' beliefs about the role of alternative assessments in the development of their teaching skills. A subsidiary aim was to cast some light on the impact alternative assessments have on promoting autonomous learning.

As research findings reveal, students' perceptions about assessment significantly influence their approaches to learning (Struyven, K. et al. 2005: 331). The way in which a student thinks about

learning determines the way in which they approach assessment tasks. Students generally perceive alternative assessment as fairer, more meaningful, enabling high quality learning through active student participation and feedback opportunities as compared to traditional assessment (Sambell et al. in Struyven et al. 2005).

Alternative assessment seems to be the most suitable assessment format in pre-service teacher training for several reasons. The use of alternative assessment in teacher training has emerged as a reaction to traditional testing which fails to assess the complex knowledge and skills students need to function effectively in a future professional context. As O'Malley and Valdez-Pierce point out (1996:2): "traditional tests do not contain authentic representations of classroom activities". According to Medley and Shannon (in Dunkin 1997) it is only teachers' competence that can be measured by paper-and-pencil tests, not teachers' performance and effectiveness. In addition, exposing student-teachers to alternative assessments as students increases the likelihood of adopting them as teachers (Liebars in Hamdan Alghamdi 2013).

. Alternative assessment combines assessment of learning which has an accountability function of measuring learning outcomes and assessment for learning aimed at modifying teaching and learning activities in order to maximize student learning outcomes. As Davison summarizes previous research (2011: 37):

"A fundamental aim of Assessment for Learning is to employ strategies which develop learner autonomy ...where the learner is encouraged...to review and evaluate their learning progress using a range of feedback derived from a variety of sources".

Using alternative assessments formatively is essential to effective teaching and learning. On one hand, using multiple assessment measures increases intra-rater reliability and objectivity in grading. On the other hand, It entails ongoing continuous feedback from the trainer or peers which teaches students to understand learning better, to reflect, think critically and self-manage their learning (Hay and Mathers 2012). Feedback plays a great role in fostering learner autonomy. Autonomous learners are not only aware of why and what they learn but also of their strengths and weaknesses as

learners. Other aspects of autonomous learning include: freedom of choice of content, task, material, pace and assessment which creates a sense of ownership of the learning process (Fenner 2006: 32).

Another characteristic of learner autonomy is that it:

“... entails a capacity and willingness on the part of the learner to act independently and in cooperation with others, as a socially responsible person” (Dam in Chan 2001: 507)”

This quotation reveals the dual nature of autonomous learning - learning independently and in interdependence on others.

At the core of these interrelated concepts is the need for learners to take initiative and develop responsibility for their own learning. The role of the teacher is to guide and mediate this process of self-directed and self-regulated learning.

As unveiling the complex nature of learner autonomy would surpass the scope of this paper, only the characteristics outlined above have been mentioned which are considered as pertaining most to understanding the relationship between alternative assessment and learner autonomy.

The course context

What follows is a brief outline of the alternative assessment tasks used to facilitate and assess pre-service teacher learning during ELT Methodology 3 (Teaching Practicum 3), a mandatory course for the teaching strand in the 7th semester. The first task is a two-minute speech students prepare in advance on a topic they choose themselves. The second task is micro-teaching a five-minute classroom activity students design themselves, the teaching point being any language component or skill or integrated skills relevant to their proficiency level and interests. The next assessment task is classroom teaching in groups of three at primary or secondary schools. The last task is keeping an observation diary based on classroom observation tasks students do while observing English lessons at primary and secondary schools.

At the end of ELT Methodology 4 (Teaching Practicum 4), a mandatory course for the teaching strand in the 8th semester, trainees

teach a formally assessed English lesson at primary or secondary school level.

2. The study

2.1 Methodology

The participants in this study were 50 pre-service teachers of English enrolled in the ELT Methodology 3 and 4 courses (Teaching Practicum 3 and 4), mandatory teacher training courses which students take in the seventh and eighth semester.

A survey was carried out at the end of the eighth semester in the academic year 2012/13. The participants were asked to describe the benefits and problems related to being assessed by each of these alternative assessments: a short speech, micro-teaching, classroom teaching and observation diary. They were also asked to comment on possible suggestions and on the relevance of the assessments for developing their teaching skills.

2.2 Results

The responses were analyzed by descriptive statistics and grouped according to the themes that emerged. Representative responses and quotes were selected to illustrate the themes.

The results are reported for each question.

1. Short speeches

Each student was supposed to prepare and present a two-minute speech on a chosen topic.

Most of the participants recognized that this was "...a great real life experience...", "...a nice introduction to real classroom teaching and a nice lead into the other assessment tasks."

Breaking through the boundary of facing an audience and gaining self-confidence were seen as a major benefit by 74% of the respondents. This activity was the first step in developing trainees' presentation and classroom management skills such as: securing and sustaining the attention of the class by establishing effective verbal

and non-verbal communication. Developing the speaking skill, i.e. focusing on various aspects of speaking such as accuracy, fluency and appropriateness of register was another major advantage according to 60% of the participants ("it was a nice speaking activity...we learnt how to be concise").

Trainees also admitted that while they were learning how to deliver an interesting speech, they broadened their knowledge on the topic they were researching. Most participants liked the fact that they could choose the topic themselves.

Learning how to manage the time, an important teaching skill, was seen as an important gain from this task (20 %).

In spite of the above mentioned advantages, the following difficulties were pointed out: the feeling of stress because this was a public speech (34 %) and time constraints ("too little time to make a point and relax").

2.3 Micro-teaching

According to 56% of the respondents, the micro-teaching task was an effective link between the short speech and classroom teaching.

Among the benefits listed was the opportunity to see progress with respect to their presentation and classroom management skills: "improved timing, learning how to deal with problems, learning how to give effective instructions." (58 %). 18 % of the participants admitted that designing classroom activities on their own was an important step in learning how to design classroom activities suitable for students' age and interests. At the same time, they learnt a lot of useful activities from each other.

This assessment experience was even more valuable because of trainer's feedback and knowing the assessment criteria in advance.

As 24 % of the trainees mentioned, micro-teaching contributed to developing their self-confidence as teachers because teaching their peers meant teaching in a safer environment ("...peer cooperation reduced stress..."; "...we gained self-confidence and learnt how to relax...").

Learning how to manage the time was again one of the major problems (34 %). Other challenges were having to manage a large class, giving effective instructions and choosing an appropriate activity.

2.4 Classroom teaching

The majority of the respondents (72%) considered individual and group classroom teaching a real teaching experience. Among the main advantages of this experience were: "...understanding the whole process of teaching better...", "...great practice of teaching skills...", "...putting theory into practice...", "...incorporating everything we've learned in the past 4 years...".

60 % of the participants emphasized the value of trainer's feedback as well as other aspects of the formative nature of these assessments: "...the previous tasks have prepared students well for this...".

The improvement of classroom management skills was seen as a benefit by 24% of the trainees. They pointed out that they had learned how to handle problem situations, how to give instructions and manage a large class, how to manage the time, etc.

The opportunity to design motivating activities on their own and learning how to be creative as well as learning how to plan lessons on their own was perceived as beneficial by 40 % of the trainees.

The respondents faced the following problems during classroom teaching which are predominantly related to classroom management: "uncooperative learners" (22 %), "not knowing the students – difficult to control them" (16 %), "time management" (14 %), "stress" (10 %), "not having much experience in lesson planning" (8 %) as well as creating appropriate activities and sequencing them (10 %).

2.5 Observation diary

The students were required to keep an observation diary based on structured observation forms focusing on different aspects of teaching and submit it at the end of the term. The majority of the respondents maintained that keeping an observation diary was a valuable experience for future teachers ("...very useful, unforgettable, totally beneficial...", "...great preparation for teaching...").

The main advantages were: getting an insight into the difference between good and bad teaching practices, learning how to structure and plan a lesson, learning a lot of useful teaching techniques, learning about different aspects of teaching and different teaching styles, analyzing what was learnt as theory, etc.

Trainees also highlighted the reflective nature of the task. Writing down their reflections on the observed lessons had not only helped them to learn teaching better, but also to develop their critical thinking through a critical approach to teaching. Several respondents believed that they would use the observation diary as a useful resource for future reference (10 %).

Despite the benefits, the respondents reported a couple problems such as: "...keeping an observation diary was time-consuming and exhausting...", "...very intense..." (24 %).

The relevance of these assessments for developing trainee' teaching skills

The responses to the question about the relevance of the above mentioned assessments for teacher training are pretty unanimous: "...much more useful than paper-and-pencil tests...", "...very helpful in developing as a teacher...", "...very relevant and useful, preparing teachers for their future work... ". Trainees also agreed that these assessment tasks had enabled them to learn how to teach effectively "in a practical way" as well as build their confidence by practicing teaching. One trainee said that they were crucial in deciding whether you want to be a teacher or not.

3. Discussion of the findings

The results of the study revealed that students' attitudes toward the alternative assessments administered during ELT Methodology 3 and 4 were predominantly positive. In line with previous research findings (Struyven et al. 2005), it can be considered that positive perceptions of assessment generate positive attitudes toward learning and maximize learning outcomes. Students agreed that the

assessment experience had enabled them to gradually develop a wide array of teaching skills and prepare for the future professional context.

The authentic learning activities were perceived as relevant and meaningful which was essential for student engagement. As Mann points out (in Davison 2011), perceiving learning opportunities as relevant and meaningful will increase engagement with the learning process at a deep level, and subsequently act as a powerful motivator. Engagement with learning is crucial in developing learner autonomy (ibid.).

The formative nature of these assessments enhanced not only the gradual development of teaching skills but also students' confidence, creativity, communication skills as well as other aspects of personal growth. Students recognized the value of formative assessment, particularly the role of feedback and reflection in developing a critical approach to teaching and improving their ability to monitor and self-manage learning. Raising awareness of the learning process, that is understanding what, why and how is learnt are among the most important features of learner autonomy (Fenner 2006).

In addition to the outcomes discussed above, other characteristics of learner autonomy can be identified. All of the tasks entailed independent and individualized learning while some were also interactive and collaborative in nature. The idea of the learning process as a combination of Individual study and collaborative learning is based on the belief that learning is both an individual and a social process. Furthermore, deciding on the content of learning (choosing speech topics, designing classroom activities, reflecting on observed classroom practices) increased student ownership of the learning process and motivation for learning.

4. Conclusion

It can be concluded that the pre-service EFL teachers who participated in the study have positive attitudes toward the alternative assessments they experienced during teacher training. As research has shown, positive perceptions of assessment have a

beneficial impact on students' approach to learning and learning outcomes.

Alternative assessments play an important role in the multi-faceted development of students' teaching skills by creating a conducive learning environment. The multi-dimensional nature of these assessments has a great potential not only in enhancing a wide range of language and content area skills in a meaningful context but also in raising students' motivation for learning, their creativity and confidence, to mention but a few aspects of personal growth. Moreover, they are a powerful resource for fostering learner autonomy by enabling students to take responsibility for their own learning.

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The role of the teacher in fostering Learner Autonomy

Abstract

Learner autonomy is based on the idea that if students are involved in decision-making processes regarding their own language competence, they are likely to be more enthusiastic about learning and learning can be more focused and purposeful for them. One of the key principles of learner autonomy is moving the focus from teaching to learning; take the teacher out of the spotlight and point it at the learners. However, autonomous learning does not imply "teacherless learning." As some scholars put it, 'teachers have a crucial role to play in launching learners into self-access.'

The focus of this paper is on the difficulties that language teachers without any autonomy-oriented training may experience in creating an autonomous classroom, as well as the ways in which teachers can foster and promote autonomy. In an autonomous classroom, three roles for the teachers are identified - the teacher as a facilitator, counsellor and a resource. Fostering autonomy in the classroom is done by providing learners with "opportunities to make significant choices and decisions about their learning. In creating an autonomous classroom, the starting point is to shift the focus from the teacher and the textbook to the learners."

This paper will also focus on how the concept of learner autonomy emphasizes the role of the learner rather than the role of the teacher. It focuses on the process rather than the product and encourages learners to develop their own purposes for learning and to see learning as a lifelong process. Using a variety of classroom materials and methods, teachers can successfully guide students in discovering the path to learning on their own. We will try to point out some things that can be done in class to enhance learners' autonomy.

Key words: teacher autonomy, learner autonomy, facilitator, lifelong learning, autonomous classroom

1. INTRODUCTION

Learner autonomy is based on the idea that if students are involved in decision-making processes regarding their own language competence, "they are likely to be more enthusiastic about learning" (Littlejohn, 1985, p. 258) and learning can be more focused and purposeful for them (Little, 1991; Dam, 1995; Camilleri, 1997).

Fostering autonomy in the classroom is done by providing learners with "opportunities to make significant choices and decisions about their learning" in an informed way (Nunan, 2003, p. 290). That means the learners have a say in what and how they learn, and the teacher encourages this by giving the learners opportunities and tools to make informed decisions regarding their learning. This applies both to choosing appropriate materials and learning strategies. Giving choices to the learners is a change that needs to be made gradually by taking into consideration their age and how much responsibility they are used to (Lowes & Target, 1999).

On a general note, the term autonomy has come to be used in at least five ways (Benson & Voller, 1997: 2):

- for situations in which learners study entirely on their own;
- for a set of skills which can be learned and applied in self-directed learning;
- for an inborn capacity which is suppressed by institutional education;
- for the exercise of learners' responsibility for their own learning;
- for the right of learners to determine the direction of their own learning

Learner autonomy has become an ultimate goal for all learners, not just those who study languages. It is our job as teachers to equip students with all the necessary life skills they will need in the real world. This is the true and the ultimate purpose of learner autonomy. A modern education should focus on the whole person of the student as a thinking, feeling, and creative individual who will become a

responsible member of society. That is the underlying idea of the learner autonomy.

However, we should always remind ourselves that, as Camilleri states it, learner autonomy is a process, sometimes a slow one, and one where the social aspects in learning are as important as the cognitive and the metacognitive. Preparation is needed both on the part of the trainer and the trainees to ensure the desired outcomes.

In reality, every teacher needs to interpret the syllabus, and sometimes to modify it according to the particular group or even create his or her own materials to fulfil the needs of one particular group, even in cases when the learning material is mandatory. As Little argues, the task for teachers, therefore, is to realize that they have this autonomy whether they like it or not, and therefore to exercise and develop learner autonomy (2004).

2. BACKGROUND

2.1 Who can be an autonomous learner?

All language learners have the capacity of becoming independent and autonomous learners. But some are more aware of the concept and possess certain qualities beforehand. As Little points out, "autonomous learners are those who understand why they are learning specific topics, accept responsibility for their learning, take the initiative in planning and executing learning activities and are willing to assess their own learning" (2002). Learners' active participation in and responsibility for their own learning process are essential in the field of foreign language teaching (Dam, 1995). The learner needs to be willing to "act independently and in co-operation with others, as a socially responsible person" (Dam, 1995).

The learner's role in an autonomous environment is not that of a passive receiver of information. Learners are the makers of their own fortune and valued members of a learning community (their class). Autonomous learners have the ability and willingness to learn on their own. Learners become successful if they take responsibility for their own learning. It is up to learners if they want to learn (Lowes & Target, 1999).

Learners become autonomous by assuming responsibility for their own learning. This includes being involved in all aspects of the learning process: planning, implementation (monitoring) and assessment. Their autonomy grows as they become conscious of the process of learning (Little, Ridley, & Ushioda, 2003).

However, learner autonomy does not mean learning alone in isolation. We are social beings and the development of learner autonomy depends on social interaction (Little 2009). Therefore, it is important that one views the classroom as a place where learners collaborate to learn and share knowledge. 'It is our condition that we learn from one another' (Little and Dam 1998), and thus, collaboration should be seen as a useful resource in encouraging greater independence in learning.

2.2 Creating an autonomous classroom

Who is in charge in the language classroom? Is it the teacher or the students? The traditional view is that teachers should be in control of the classroom and direct learning. To some, learner autonomy may sound more like bringing chaos into the classroom. Nevertheless teachers can successfully make the choice of relinquishing control and sharing it with the learners (Lacey, 2007). What can the teacher do in order to share the responsibility for learning?

1. *Identify needs*: carry out a needs analysis with students and link these needs with classroom activities

2. *Set goals*: discuss and help learners identify and set realistic learning goals

3. *Plan learning*: include learners in decisions on what to learn and pacing of lesson

4. *Select resources*: provide the opportunity for learners to bring in authentic resources to share and learn with the rest of the class

5. *Select learning strategies*: incorporate strategy instruction with classroom activities and allow time for learners to discuss and reflect on their strategy use

6. *Practice*: offer choice, for example, in the types of homework tasks to complete so that they are using language in ways that are relevant to them

7. *Monitor progress*: students can record, and reflect on, their learning experiences in a learning diary which can be shared with other members of the class or used as private dialogue between teacher and student

8. *Assess and revise*: provide alternate forms of assessment and reflection activities such as language checklists (e.g. the European Language Portfolio) and self and peer assessment worksheets /activities (Reinders (2010: 46-49).

LEARNING STAGES	TEACHER-DIRECTED	LEARNER-DIRECTED
Identifying needs	Placement tests	Learner experiences difficulties in using the language.
Setting goals	Determined by the course	Contextually determined
Planning learning	Determined by the teacher	Contextually determined
Selecting resources	Provided by teacher	Self-selection by learners.
Selecting learning strategies	Teacher models and Instructions	Self-selection by learners
Practice	Exercises and activities provided by teacher	Implementation (language use) and experimentation
Monitoring progress	classroom feedback	Self-monitoring, peer Feedback
Assessment and revision	Tests, curriculum changes	Self-assessment, reflection

Figure 1. Stages in the development of learner autonomy (Reinders, 2010:46)

2.3 The role of the teacher

One of the key principles of learner autonomy is moving the focus from teaching to learning; to take the teacher out of the spotlight and point it at the learners.

Nevertheless, autonomous learning is by no means "teacherless learning." As Sheerin (1997, cited in Benson & Voller, 1997: 63) puts it, 'teachers have a crucial role to play in launching learners into self-access.' In creating a learner-centered classroom, the starting point is to shift the focus from the teacher and the textbook to the learners.

Moving the focus from teaching to learning clearly doesn't mean that the teacher becomes obsolete or redundant. It means a change of pace from where lessons are organized around textbook material and the ground a teacher needs to cover. Lessons are now organized in collaboration with learners in regards to both material and methods. It means that the content becomes secondary to the language learning skills that the students learn how to acquire. Those skills will be the basis for lifelong learning which is considered to be the ultimate goal of learner autonomy.

In such a learner-based classroom Voller (1997) identifies three roles for the teachers:

- The teacher as a facilitator - The teacher's position is to manage the activities in the classroom and help learners plan their learning both for the long and the short term. The teacher has to be able to establish a close collaboration with the learners and make sure that all learners know what is expected of them at all times (Lowes & Target, 1999).
- The teacher as a counsellor - They need to inform learners and make them capable of choosing the best learning strategies. Learners have to be able to make informed choices. This means knowing the rationale behind the strategies and having time to experiment to find which suits best for each occasion. Teachers must, however, be careful not to guide the learners implicitly to the strategies they themselves prefer (Nunan, 2003).

- The teacher as a resource – the teacher is helping learners to develop an awareness of their learning styles and the various learning strategies available to them in order to direct them to appropriate learning materials.

The degree to which learners can become autonomous and take responsibility for their learning depends on their relationship with the teacher. Learner autonomy is an *interdependent* relationship where the subject of learning, in our case English as a second language, is placed between teacher and learner. It is in this space that the teacher helps the learner to develop his or her ability to make choices in the learning. This is probably the true essence and meaning of autonomy. Just as learning is social, so is learner autonomy. Learner autonomy is an awareness of the self as a learner which is developed through dialogue (e.g. with the teacher), social interaction and cooperation with others.

A teacher aiming to foster learner autonomy in his classroom also has to be aware of the importance of differentiation. Differentiating instruction is the idea of accommodating different ways learners learn; to design the lessons according to learners' needs and differences in the classroom. In a differentiated classroom it should be taken into consideration that learners have different abilities, skills and backgrounds. All of this affects the way they learn (Tomlinson, 2003).

Fundamental to bringing more autonomy into classrooms are teachers' beliefs about teaching and learning (Lamb 2008). Without involving teachers in a self-reflection of their own well-established beliefs about teaching and learning—including teacher and learner roles and responsibilities—there is a strong chance that any effort to promote more autonomous classrooms will be unsuccessful. Teachers' beliefs are resistant to change (Borg 2003) and therefore should always be the starting point when introducing new ideas and concepts.

3. DISCUSSION

3.1 Problems in implementing learner autonomy in the classroom

Insecurities on the part of the teachers arise from the necessity to fulfil all the curricular demands and tests (Dam, 2000). Special concerns relate to the exam system: "Am I keeping pace with other classes?" "Do my learners feel that they are making progress?" "How do I know that they are learning enough?" Teachers are also concerned about the reaction of weak and difficult learners. The weak learners will be the losers, and it might be demanding for learners to take hold and assume responsibility. It might be difficult for the teacher to let go and take risks with a new approach (Little, Ridley, & Ushioda, 2003).

Moreover, teachers may be reluctant to bring more learner autonomy into the classroom due to the cultural stereotypes they have of their students. They may feel that since their students come from a culture (both Macedonian and Albanian) which depends heavily on the authority of the teacher and institution and they will feel uncomfortable with learner autonomy initiatives. Furthermore, these students may think that the teacher is being lazy and not doing their job. Secondly, teachers could be afraid of handing over some responsibility to their learners for fear of losing control, especially if they have had control of the classroom for most of their teaching life (Lacey 2007). Another concern involves institutional pressures. Some teachers have a strict curriculum to follow and deadlines to meet which makes the development of learner autonomy all the more difficult.

The last thing we can mention is the fact that the teachers can develop and foster learner autonomy only if they themselves are autonomous. Little (2000:45) claims that the development of learner autonomy depends on the development of teacher autonomy. By this he means two things: (i) that it is unreasonable to expect teachers to foster the growth of autonomy in their learners if they themselves don't know what it is to be an autonomous learner; and (ii) that in determining the initiatives that they take in the classrooms, teachers must be able to exploit their professional skills autonomously,

applying to their teaching those same reflective and self-managing processes that they apply to their learning.

3.2 Recommendations for SEEU teachers

What can SEEU teachers who teach the English language do to implement learner autonomy in their classrooms? What skills do they need to possess and what particular knowledge?

First of all, teachers need to let go of the classroom control and realize that their main task is not just transmitting the knowledge to the students. They should acquire new roles as facilitators, counsellors and resource persons. When more emphasis is put on the students themselves in finding materials to learn, methods for learning, and searching for information, then they will ask the teacher to guide them through that path.

What teachers can do at the beginning is simply adapt the materials from the textbooks they use in class. No textbook is suitable for every student in every group. Students should be included in the process of deciding what to learn and what not. This works best with the ESP groups that we have at SEEU, especially with the students studying Computer Sciences or Business Informatics. The world of technology is so rapidly developing that no textbook in the world can follow those changes. We can utilize students' need to be keeping pace with the technology change and create materials together that will be motivating for them to learn from.

Students from basic levels should also find their own materials and use their imagination and creativity in making classes more motivating and challenging.

Second, there are certain characteristics that autonomous teachers need to develop. Camilleri (1997b) states that the teachers need to become aware of their own personal influence on the learning process, and that they should understand pedagogy, be skilled in management and create a more relaxing atmosphere.

Finally, it is better if learner autonomy is presented as an alternative and not as a replacement for the existing approach. The main purpose is to start the learners on their own journeys towards self-knowledge and self-reliance (Camilleri, 1997a).

4. CONCLUSION

It is no longer arguable whether the teacher has or does not have an important role in fostering learner autonomy. It is clear that it is the responsibility of the teacher to promote autonomous, critically-thinking students in a classroom where the lesson content becomes a secondary goal. As Esch (1996) nicely puts it, autonomy does not mean:

- self-instruction/learning without a teacher;
- that intervention or initiative on the part of a teacher is banned;
- something teachers do to learners

The promotion of learner autonomy thus requires a change in beliefs about language learning on the part of both learner and teacher, as well as a corresponding change in roles, and learners and teachers may need preparation (if not explicit training) to undertake self instruction (Dickinson 1987:121).

As was said earlier in the paper, teachers equip students with lifelong learning skills. With such skills, an individual will learn how to ask questions, how to set goals, and how to reflect on achievement. To achieve such goals, teachers themselves need to learn to let go of classroom control, reflect upon their own learning and teaching experiences and their own beliefs about what autonomy is.

Having that in mind we can conclude by quoting Trim (1988:3), who asserts that having been equipped with the knowledge of learning by oneself, one has been equipped for a lifetime of knowledge – “No school, or even university, can provide its pupils with all the knowledge and the skills they will need in their active adult lives. It is more important for a young person to have an understanding of himself or herself, an awareness of the environment and its workings, and to have learned how to think and how to learn”.

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Materials development and language Learner Autonomy

Abstract

This paper aims to analyze the relationships between language learning textbooks and the way textbooks promote autonomy in language learning. The paper analyses the current literature regarding the relationship between the course textbooks and language learners' autonomy and the views on the impact that course books have on language learners' autonomy. In the ELT literature, the views about the influence of textbooks on learners' autonomy are polarized. Authors (Richards, 1993, in Tomlinson, 1) argue that structured textbooks discourage language learners' autonomy and foster the dependence on the teacher. However, other authors are more positive regarding the role that course books can play in promoting language learners' autonomy. Hutchinson and Torres (1994) argue that textbooks provide structure which can act as a safe base from which the learners can successfully develop autonomy. Apart from analyzing the differences between these opposed points of view, the paper offers suggestions and recommendations on the topic of curriculum development textbooks adaptation and development of materials which foster learners' autonomy in the context of language studies.

Keywords: language learning, learners, textbook, autonomy.

1. Introduction and background

The importance of the development of learners' autonomy has been emphasised in the context of language teaching and learning in the course of the last two decades. Defined as: "Having the capacity for detachment, critical reflection, decision-making, and independent action'" (Little, 1991, p.4 in Thanasoulas, in 2000, p.1), the concept of autonomy gives a chance to the learners to assume greater

responsibility for their own learning. Still, as Thanasoulas (2001, p.1) points out: "... learner autonomy does not mean that the teacher becomes redundant, abdicating his/her control over what is transpiring in the language learning process". It can be assumed that although the role of the learner is emphasised within the framework of language learner autonomy, it does not mean the role of the teacher is diminished. However, the question which is analyzed in this paper relates more to the third element in the language learning process.

This article focuses on the following research question: Do language learning materials and textbooks promote language learner autonomy? If so, in which way do they promote learner autonomy? Reinders & Balcikanli (2011, p.265) state the following: "The development of learner autonomy is sometimes carried out through 'learner training' or 'dedicated strategy instruction' but the most likely context in which learners come into contact with the idea of autonomy on a regular basis, is the language course, and by extension, the textbook used in that course". Of course, it can be argued that language textbooks are the most likely contact of the learner with the target language outside the class, especially in the era of social networks, the World Wide Web, television channels and Internet live stream broadcasts.

However, it is logical to think, that whenever learners assume responsibility for their own learning outside the language learning class, a language textbook is the first source for learning and revising. Reinders & Balcikanli (2011, p.265) state the following: "Course textbooks may include some deliberate focus on the learning process and encourage students to reflect on their progress and as such are likely to play an important potential role in the development of students' independent learning skills. However, it is unclear how textbooks implement this, or indeed, if they really do. If they do not, or do so inadequately, then it is less likely that students will develop as autonomous learners."

In the literature related to language teaching and learning, the views about the influence of textbooks on learners' autonomy are polarized. Tomlinson (2012) categorizes language learning materials

into informative (informing the learner about the language), instructional (guiding the learner towards further practice), experiential (providing the learner with experience in language use), eliciting (encouraging the learner to use the language), and exploratory (helping the learner to make discoveries about the language), the last three offering more opportunities for language learner autonomy. However, according to Tomlinson (2012, p.143) :” ...the reality is that most commercially produced materials focus on informing their users about language features and on guiding them to practice these features”, which means that the majority of textbooks are structured and offer fewer chances for autonomous language learning. Certain authors, for instance Richards (1993) in Tomlinson (1998) also argue that textbooks, especially textbooks which are structured discourage language learner’s autonomy and foster the dependence on the teacher.

On the other hand, there are authors who are more positive regarding the role that course books can play in promoting language learners’ autonomy. Hutchinson and Torres (1994) argue that textbooks provide structure which can act as a safe base from which the learners can successfully develop autonomy. They state the following: “Learners see the textbook as a 'framework' or 'guide' that helps them to organize their learning both inside and outside the classroom - during discussions in lessons, while doing activities and exercises, studying on their own, doing homework, and preparing for tests. It enables them to learn 'better, faster, clearer (sic), easier (sic), more” (Hutchinson & Torres, 1994, p. 318). They also define the interaction between the teacher, materials, and learners in the following way:

This interaction has to be managed in order to provide the structure and predictability that are necessary to make the event socially tolerable to the participants, to enable learners and teachers to know where the lesson fits into the general pattern of things, to save teachers and learners work, and to give legitimate external parties access to, and possibly influence upon, what takes place in the classroom. The very fact that a lesson is a dynamic interaction, therefore, leads

not to a need for maximum freedom, but to a need for a predictable and visible structure both within the lesson and across lessons. The textbook, we suggest, is the best means of providing this structure.

(Hutchinson & Torres 1994, p.321)

Therefore, it is important to analyse the relationship between language learner autonomy and textbooks and to find various modes which can foster learner autonomy in language teaching and learning.

2. Methods

Despite of the fact that the importance of language learner autonomy is constantly emphasized, it is clear that there is very little practical research done in terms of analyzing the relationship between the textbooks and language learner autonomy. The small scale research completed for the purpose of this paper and described analyses four language textbooks intended for learners of upper intermediate language proficiency, which are widely used and used in the context of teaching and learning English as a foreign language in the context of South Eastern European University. The aim of the research is to analyze the textbooks in terms of the impact that they have on development of autonomous learners. The textbooks chosen are the following:

- Cutting Edge (Upper Intermediate)
- English Result (Upper Intermediate)
- Wishes 2.2 (Upper Intermediate)
- English File (Upper intermediate)

The idea was to implement the nine steps that David Nunan (2003) described and suggested as a continuum from dependence to autonomy and to review the textbooks in terms of those steps. According to Nunan (2003) the implementation of those steps involves the learners, the teachers, the materials, the setting and the curriculum. Nunan (2003, p.195) defined the program as follows: "There are levels and degrees of learner autonomy. In fact,

dependence and autonomy are not categorically distinct. Rather, they exist on a continuum". The steps which facilitate learner autonomy described by Nunan (2003) are applicable in the context of language learning and teaching. In addition, they encompass the materials as well as the learners and the setting. As a result, they were appropriate as a framework of analysis.

The aim of the research was to analyse the way the textbooks present and facilitate the following steps to learner autonomy.

Step 1: Make instruction goals clear to learners (explaining the aims and objectives of the lesson and involving students).

Step 2: Allow learners to create their own goals (learners create their own goals, content and modify the course content).

Step 3: Encourage learners to use their second language outside the classroom (encouraging the learners to think about activating their language outside the classroom).

Step 4: Raise awareness of learning processes (making students aware of not only what, but also how they learn, in other words raising the awareness of the strategies needed to tackle an activity or a task).

Step 5: Help learners identify their own preferred styles and strategies via questionnaires or lists of characteristics which helps the learners to recognize their learning styles or strategies (and providing them with options and activities to suit their styles and strategies).

Step 6: Encourage learner choice (providing the learners with a variety of different activities and enabling them to choose the activity or their role in it).

Step 7: Allow learners to generate their own tasks (enabling them to modify and adapt the activities)

Step 8: Encourage learners to become teachers (activities which give the learners an opportunity to teach some of the content learned, which motivates the learner and facilitates learning).

Step 9: Encourage learners to become researchers (activities which educate the learners to become language researchers, for instance writing field notes, interpreting patterns or discussions about the language).

3. Results

The selected textbooks listed above were reviewed and compared according to the steps suggested and elaborated by Nunan (2003) as well as compared in terms of facilitating language learner autonomy. The results of the comparison are presented in the chart below and are as follows:

Table 1: Textbooks selected for study and steps to learner autonomy

Steps to Learner Autonomy	Cutting Edge	Wishes 2.2	English File	English Result
<i>Make instruction goals clear to learners</i>	Yes, the learning goals and outcomes are listed at the beginning of each module	Yes, although not explicitly. There is a section at the beginning of each module listing some of the outcomes (Listen, read and talk about).	Not sufficiently, although there is a brief list of grammar and vocabulary at the beginning of each module.	Yes, very clearly via sections ABC Put it all together and I can which summarize the learning outcomes.
<i>Allow learners to create their own goals</i>	Yes/ via sections USEFUL VOCABULARY	No	No	No
<i>Encourage learners to use their second language outside the classroom</i>	Yes/via sections TASKS, projects which the students can work on together (poster presentations)	No	Yes, especially via writing tasks (writing biographies , for	Yes, via writing tasks

			instance)	
<i>Raise awareness of learning processes</i>	Yes (there are some instructions in the textbook which help students improve / be aware of their learning strategies	No	Yes (there are sets of instructions in the textbook which help students improve their learning strategies	
<i>Help learners identify their own preferred styles and strategies</i>	No	No	No	No
<i>Encourage learner choice</i>	Yes, via communication activities which are part of several modules	No	No	No
<i>Allow learners to generate their own tasks</i>	No	No	No	No
<i>Encourage learners to become teachers</i>	No	No	No	No
<i>Encourage learners to become researchers</i>	No	No	No	No

Table 1: Comparison of the results

It can be concluded from Table 1 that the majority of the textbooks (3 out of 4) make the instruction goals clear to the learners, especially via charts introduced at the beginning of the textbooks or each module which state concisely the expected learning outcomes. However, the next step of language learner autonomy, which is allowing learners to create their own goals, is introduced by one of the textbooks only. The majority of the textbooks encourage the learners to use the target language outside the classroom and half of them help the learners to be more aware of the learning processes. However, the textbooks do not encourage, or at least not sufficiently, the development of learners' preferred learning styles and strategies and encouraging learners' choice of activities. The most obvious result is that the textbooks fail to enable and encourage the learners to assume more responsibilities for their own learning and assume new roles of teachers and researchers in the learning process.

4. Discussion, conclusions and recommendations

The steps of achieving learner autonomy and the chart presented above offer several conclusions related to language teaching materials and textbooks. First of all, it is clear that we cannot rely solely on textbooks in order to develop learner autonomy. Although it is true that textbooks are the most obvious source which can offer the concept of autonomy to learners, it is clear that textbooks cannot be the only source which will facilitate the steps to learner autonomy. The chart above shows that some of the textbooks fail to facilitate almost every step towards learner autonomy. In addition, the textbooks also do not provide tasks, materials or activities which encourage the learners to become teachers or language researchers. As Reinders & Balcikanli (2011, p.270) state: " Teachers may expect popular textbooks published by major publishers to present the state-of-the-art in language teaching, but this clearly does not extend to skills for self-directed learning".

Therefore, one suggestion for the curriculum designers, the teachers and the textbook writers is that they should consider the need to assess the roles of textbooks and materials in the process of language learning and in terms of language learner autonomy.

Curriculum designers have the opportunity to rethink the language courses curricula and incorporate elements which will enable the learners to acquire higher level of language learner autonomy, by providing them with opportunities and tasks to use the target language outside the classroom and to enable them to research the language. This can be accomplished via different projects which can include participation in group projects (presentations, poster presentations, websites design, and forums) or projects which involve cooperation with different schools and universities (conferences).

Another suggestion is that the teachers might consider modifying adapting or creating materials which will supplement the existing textbooks and will help the learners to select their own tasks, choose among the activities and assume the role of the teacher. Various activities including communicative tasks which offer the students the opportunity to choose or define their role, team teaching activities and debates may serve this purpose.

Finally, the textbooks themselves may facilitate the steps towards autonomy. The most obvious way is to list clearly the objectives of the lessons. This can be accomplished at the beginning of every lesson by listing the grammar, vocabulary or the skills addressed in a lesson, or by summarizing clearly what the learners should be able to do or accomplish after completing the lesson. In addition, it is also possible to increase the awareness of the learners of the learning strategies and styles via questionnaires descriptions or tasks which suits their particular learning style the best. Evidently, there is an abundance of potentials to incorporate and foster autonomy in language learning.

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Student Use of Teacher Feedback: Implications for Autonomous Writing

Abstract

In this paper, I will report on an investigation into the perceived impact of my own written feedback on aspects of two undergraduate students' development into academic writers. I will focus on the ways two students used my feedback (including why they sometimes chose not to) and the implications their choices had for the development of their autonomy as writers. I will first present data gathered via (1) an analysis of the students' revisions as submitted in their academic writing portfolios and (2) interviews with the authors of the portfolios about their notably different levels of responsiveness to my feedback. I will comment on the elicited reasons behind my students' decisions to embrace or to ignore my feedback (such as identity issues, but also plain misunderstanding of the teacher's feedback) and will discuss the outcomes of such potential manifestation of student agency. Finally, I will suggest implications for teaching writing for academic purposes in similar undergraduate contexts.

Keywords: academic writing, student use of teacher feedback, learner autonomy, writing identity.

1. Introduction to the classroom Research Project

As an advocate of social constructivism in education (Williams and Burden, 1997), in my academic writing classes I encourage my students to approach the feedback they receive from myself and/or from their peer critically. This, of course, means that I expect them to take on board the feedback that they believe can be conducive to an improved revision of their academic writing tasks and to reject

what is unlikely to improve their writing. However, giving writing feedback to many students gave rise to the suspicion that not all students are ready or willing to give the suggested critical processing of feedback a proper go. For instance, some students neatly followed all my suggestions for improvement, while others persistently ignored some aspects of my feedback. I was eager to learn how they went about using my feedback, i.e. how they decided to use or to ignore it. I also looked forward to investigating the impact of their choices on the development of their autonomy as academic writers.

To be able to address the above aspects of academic writing, I first reviewed the literature on (1) learner autonomy, (2) the development of student identities in writing and (2) teacher feedback in order to map the terrain and define the major constructs to be used in this paper.

Learner autonomy has been defined by Holec as “the ability to take charge of one’s learning [...] to have, and to hold, the responsibility for all the decisions concerning all aspects of this learning” (1981: 3), the specific decisions listed being: determining course objectives, content, methods and evaluation. To this definition Dam (1995) adds the concept of “willingness” (to direct one’s own learning), as ability on its own may not always be conducive to learner autonomy.

Becoming academically literate is, to students of many backgrounds, a matter of acculturating to a new, foreign academic code of conduct (Hyland, 2012), which has its own rules, restrictions and liberties to be understood, internalised and practised. This requirement for students to adapt to the academic set of conventions if they are to join the academic community implies, to some authors, the necessity for students to develop parallel, academic identities for themselves. To illustrate, Scollon claims that academic writing is “as much the construction of an authorial self as the presentation of fact” (in Hyland, 2012: p. 145).

What seems to link the above two areas of teaching, i.e. learner autonomy and academic identities, is the role of teacher feedback in fostering students’ self-directed learning and identity creation. Hyland and Hyland (2006) wrote about the change of focus in

teacher feedback on student writing in the 1970s, with feedback mostly dealing with correcting errors and assessing papers before, and becoming more process-directed after the '70s threshold. This means that the teacher continues to have a central role in the process of giving feedback (Hyland, 2003), but their feedback now focuses on how to help the students to produce better, revised drafts rather than only on assessing their end-of-term writing pieces. The teacher is, therefore, not only seen as an evaluator, but also as a reader and a coach (Cowan in Leki, 1990). Despite this change in mind set in educators' circles, research suggests that students still tend to perceive teacher feedback as unclear (hence, often misunderstood) and/or authoritative and sometimes outright insensitive (Hyland, 2003). By feedback in this paper I will mean my written commentary on the students' writing, both in the form of marginal comments and overall, end comments. My commentary referred to various aspects of the students' writing, as outlined in the three broad criteria in the portfolio assessment band scale, tailored for the purposes of my academic writing course: content, language (grammar, vocabulary, organisation and mechanics) and argumentation.

To structure my feedback-related curiosity in such a way as to keep a narrow, yet researchable scope, I formulated the following research questions:

1. How did the students perceive my feedback?
2. How did the students use my feedback?
3. Why did the students use my feedback in the way they did?

I was hoping that my feedback-focused inquiry would make it possible for both learner autonomy- and identity-related issues to surface as the research unfolded.

This research was embedded in the tertiary context of a third-year undergraduate academic writing course, geared towards equipping students with the skills of developing an argument in writing while acknowledging sources. The final course outcome was to write a persuasive and adequately referenced research paper (following the APA style) on a current social phenomenon that opinions are typically divided on. The students compiled their course work in portfolios and submitted them for assessment.

2. METHODS

In order to yield more detailed, though, admittedly, less generalizable data, I envisaged this research as a set of case studies of two students, anonymised by the pseudonyms of Karin and Thor, who demonstrated very different styles of using my feedback. Namely, Karin readily accepted virtually all my feedback, as opposed to Thor, who did not accept feedback that I deemed crucial for the improvement of such aspects of his writing as his argument and language. To make their feedback practices tangible, I resorted to two methods of data collection: (1) text analysis of both their drafts and their reflection papers as submitted for assessment in the format of a portfolio and (2) semi-structured interviews with the students on selected aspects of their use of my feedback. The interviews were conducted in the students' mother tongue (i.e. Macedonian) so as to prevent any potential linguistic barriers in the process of data generation. The quotes used in this research paper were translated into English by the author.

3. FINDINGS

When asked about their perceptions of the teacher's feedback, Karin and Thor's views differed in almost all respects, as summarised in a note form in Table 1 below. Karin, on the one hand, found my feedback helpful in terms of language, content and argumentation:

"They [the teacher's comments] helped me think about how I could write the same thing in a better way so as to persuade the readers better."

She thought my comments were clear enough, neutral in tone (rather than, say, authoritative) and balanced in the sense of the ratio marginal comments – end comments. She, however, felt that the marginal comments were too detailed and "hair-splitting". She would not change the end comments in length nor in content: she thought

they served as a helpful reminder at the end of the essay about what needed doing next.

Thor, on the other hand, expressed some reservation when it came to the usefulness and the clarity of my comments. He claimed that they were mostly useful and clear, particularly when it came to language and argumentation. His reservations are better illustrated in his comment on the tone of my feedback, which he described as “liberating”:

“You once said in class that we don’t have to follow your comments, that they function as guidelines, not rules; that you don’t have absolute knowledge in the area and the comments are your opinions coming from a more neutral standing point [than the students’]. That’s why I decided to act on some and not on others.”

This appreciation of guidelines (and not rules) was a resounding echo in his interview. Thor seems to have interpreted my suggestion that students should critically process any feedback (be it teacher or peer feedback) before accepting suggestions for revision as an invitation to exercise liberty (autonomy) in his writing. Thor appreciated the “detailed” nature of my marginal comments, mostly due to them referring to specific aspects of his writing. He was not particularly fond of my end comments as he thought they were superfluous: they merely re-capped the key points in his writing which required revision and contained a note of encouragement.

Table 1: The two students’ perceptions of my feedback

Comments on teacher feedback	Karin	Thor
Helpful	Yes	Mostly
Clear	Yes	Mostly
Tone	Neutral	Liberating
Marginal comments	Too detailed	OK
End comments	OK	Superfluous

When asked to compare the nature of the feedback they received from their peers and that from the teacher, Karin and Thor were unanimous in their perception that the feedback from the

teacher was more valuable. Karin supports this claim by suggesting that the teacher is “more knowledgeable and provides more detailed feedback than the peers”. Thor perceives the teacher’s feedback as “more authoritative and respected”, suggesting that this might partially have been the reason he had not taken on board some of my feedback, as he reported problems respecting authority. To him, peers’ comments were more technical in nature and mostly to do with verb tenses, word choice and sentence length. They were, nevertheless useful as they helped him notice aspects in his writing that he failed to do on his own. The teacher’s comments, on the other hand, dealt with more general issues, too, such as that of developing argumentation. Thor was sceptical that his peers could notice any flaws in his argumentation, for instance.

On the topic of how they use the teacher’s feedback and why, Karin and Thor reported in their interviews and demonstrated in their portfolios quite different responses. Karin proved to be very open to suggestions for improvement and mostly accepted my comments by acting on them. She would usually redraft following my comments and then compare the two drafts realising that “in 100% of the cases” her revised work read better. Figure 1 (*Karin’s first draft (Excerpt A) and teacher’s comment*) and Figure 2 (*Karin’s revised excerpt*) illustrate the product of one instance of such editing:

His column is full of offensive words that he uses to describe LGBT people, and he as a renowned journalist should know better that he should write objectively,

Comment [E16]: also, in a non-discriminatory way (maybe expand on this and quote the journalist code of conduct?)

Figure 1: Karin’s first draft (Excerpt A) and teacher’s comment

Figure 2: Karin’s revised excerpt

Looking back on her work, she fondly remembers redrafting,

His column is full of offensive words that he uses to describe LGBT people, and he as a renowned journalist should know better that he should write objectively, avoid stereotyping by sexual orientation, regard the matter from a perspective of the group concerned, and avoid causing harm (Society of Professional Journalists, 2013).

claiming that it was not traumatic for her to see the structure of her

A person’s sexual orientation is not dependent of the person’s upbringing,

Comment [E15]: you’d need support for this claim, too

work constantly changing – quite the opposite, really: “It was a relief for me” as she felt she was being redirected on the right path rather than left to stray. For example, reflecting on her revision illustrated in Figure 2 (*Karin’s revised excerpt*), she feels she did well revising her text in the suggested direction: “It fit in perfectly with what I had there... The Code of Conduct suggestion became the perfect rebuttal”. However, Karin sometimes rejected my comments as is the case in Figure 3 below (*Karin’s first draft - Excerpt B*) below:

Figure 3: Karin’s first draft (Excerpt B)

In her revised draft, Karin’s contested sentence simply disappears. When asked about how she made the decision and why, she justified her choice by word limit considerations: she could not afford more text to support the argument in question. I explained that the support I suggested did not need to be wordy (for instance, just a quick, two-word in-text citation would have sufficed), she replied: “I did not even think about that. I thought I had to expand my essay.” The missing revision of the text in Figure 3 (*Karin’s first draft - Excerpt B*), therefore, was due to Karin misunderstanding my comment.

Thor, on the other hand, demonstrates less acceptance of my feedback. Figure 4 (*Thor’s first draft (Excerpt C) and teacher’s comment*) illustrates one such ignored suggestion for improvement.

Figure 4: Thor’s first draft (Excerpt C) and teacher’s comment

When asked about why he decided not to act on my comment, Thor said: “My version of the sentence sounds more powerful”, suggesting that my proposed solution sounded weak and neutral. It seems as if my stylistic suggestion did not fit in with how Thor saw himself as an academic writer. Another comment that he chose to

What are the real-time results? The aptitude of professionals is on a downward spiral, since family
and personal relationships prevail over competence. And to make matters worse, public
administration bites off staggering 40%+ of the GDP, further hindering the already terrible economic
situation with inflation.

Comment [E9]: Are you excluding the possibility of some “relative” being the best expert in the area the country has to offer? Should their origin come in the way of their professional development?

ignore referred to his argumentation, as illustrated in Figure 5 (*Thor's first draft (Excerpt D) and teacher's comment*):

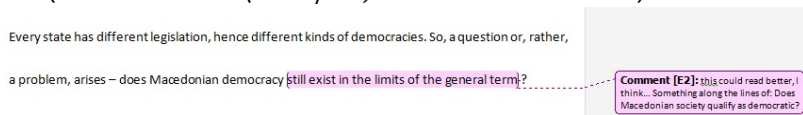


Figure 5: *Thor's first draft (Excerpt D) and teacher's comment*

Asked why he chose to disregard this suggestion, Thor claimed he was not convinced by the argumentative stance I suggested, adding: "exceptions don't cancel out the rules". He felt that conceding that would just waste words from his word limit. Thor added that he appreciated when the teacher had an opinion of their own on the topic in question rather than being objective or neutral. To him, it is a source of motivation: "If the teacher doesn't agree, I want to persuade them; if they do agree, I want to develop my argument better". Finally, a sentence that I had suggested directions for improvement for (*Figure 6: Thor's first draft (Excerpt E) and teacher's comments*) disappeared from Thor's following draft:

Practice shows that 100% of the cases concerning the issue of nepotism end without a judicial resolution says who? (reference). More importantly, the tendency rises again, reference? (unless you've authored this fact).

Figure 6: *Thor's first draft (Excerpt E) and teacher's comments*

His explanation was that he had taken my comment to mean that he was supposed to provide statistics as reference, while I merely meant a source. This case also points in the direction of a possible misunderstanding of what I had meant by support.

On the topic of the biggest challenges encountered on the academic writing course focused on developing an argument, Karin foregrounded referencing as one of her major concerns:

"The hardest thing was referencing and I felt smothered because I couldn't express my opinion as well as I'd wanted to. Instead, I had to quote various sources, which I hated."

Thor shares Karin's dislike of referencing:

"I'm not entirely convinced about referencing. I appreciate discussion and [individual] observation. [...] Why should I take someone else as an authority and not myself?"

Thor found the whole practice of supporting his opinion a real challenge. He also struggled with having to redraft multiple times before submitting a final version. He found it useful in the beginning, when he realised that his very first draft was "catastrophic", but once he got comfortable with the genre, the need for revision lessened. This resulted in him not needing a third draft for the final essay paragraphs as his second draft would have sufficed.

The research seemed to have been an overall rewarding experience for Karin, as the paper prompted her to investigate a multitude of aspects relating to the essay topic of her choice, i.e. the rights of the LGBT population in Macedonia. Looking back, she says: "The results [of my research] were shocking!" Indeed, by the end of her investigation she felt she had created a research story of her own which shocked her into a new understanding, as a citizen, of the social aspect she had chosen to explore. While Thor reportedly often struggled in his research process, he conceded that he, too, had important learning moments on the course: the way in which he developed arguments changed and he learned that one's text (be it written or spoken) was more likely to be persuasive if it contained support and was fallacy-free.

4. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS AND TEACHING IMPLICATIONS

From the findings above, it transpires that both students generally found the teacher's feedback useful, though they reported different aspects of it as more useful than others. Both students used my feedback by accepting such suggestions that they believed would improve their papers, with Thor being more careful than Karin. Thor's reasons for rejecting some language- and argumentation-

related feedback seemed mostly connected to identity issues (e.g. insisting on sounding more “powerful” in his expression and not acknowledging “weak” arguments on the part of the opponents). Interestingly, both Karin and Thor reported understanding my feedback in ways that I had not meant – a finding which can have serious pedagogical implications. One such implication would be to include discussing the teacher’s feedback as a peer review task, so students can check their interpretations of the teacher’s comments with their peers. Another would be to combine the teacher’s written feedback with teacher-student conferencing. A particularly rewarding teacher strategy would be to constantly encourage students to critically process the teacher and/or peer feedback they receive in order to foster the development of both their identities and their autonomy as writers. Developing their referencing skill, for instance, proved to be a serious source of identity problems for the students and this warrants a careful approach to teaching that skill, in practical and non-identity-threatening ways. One way to organise such classroom instruction would be, as was suggested by Leni Dam following my talk at the SEEU learner autonomy conference, by publishing a manual inspired by this research to share my insights with the students. Alerting them to common issues in referencing, argumentation and research in general, as illustrated by their former peers’ work and perceptions, is expected to reduce future misunderstandings and lift the communication levels in the classroom. Yet another boost to students’ confidence to develop into autonomous writers with distinct identities would be to make it possible for a transfer of skills to take place from the academic classroom to real life, for instance by setting up a class web environment for the publication of the students’ papers, so they are authentically exposed to a wider audience.

5. CONCLUSION

The two case studies in this paper shed some light not only on how the students (differently) viewed the teacher's feedback on their writing, but also, more importantly, what factors might underpin their decisions to accept or reject the teacher's suggestions for improvement. Identity issues transpired to be very important in how the students used their writing feedback, but cognitive drawbacks, such as potentially unclearly phrased feedback on the part of the teacher, played a significant role, too. Fostering the development of the students' critical faculties (for example, by inviting them to critically process the feedback they receive) is therefore one of the resounding recommendations in this paper to fellow teachers looking to effectively tap into their students' development as autonomous academic writers and, ultimately, as more critically-minded citizens.

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Fostering Learner Autonomy Through Differentiation Strategies

Abstract

In language classes, being able to produce autonomous learners is an important quality that students can attain because the skills that students master during their studies will help them in the real world. There are different techniques available that can help teachers implement autonomous learning in their classes, but one important strategy that teachers should apply is differentiation. Each student has different background knowledge, learning styles, their preferences, and in a language classroom even different language proficiencies. The aim of this paper is to identify the application of differentiated instruction (DI) strategies used in EFL courses at South East European University (SEEU) in Tetovo, Macedonia, which will help mixed-ability students become more autonomous. After a review of a related literature, a proposed checklist was used in determining what strategies are currently in use by EFL lecturers. The study was conducted in the winter semester 2013. The questionnaire used for this study was based on the six fundamental components of differentiated instruction as suggested by Tomlinson (2010) "student interest, assessment, lesson planning, content, process and product" (cited in Whipple, 2012, p.42). In this paper, the results of a study conducted in a few sample EFL classes are provided, and they show teachers' level of understanding and implementation of differentiation strategies. It was concluded that EFL lecturers in their teaching mostly implemented the items under content and least implemented item was the student interest. It is suggested that lecturers continuously adapt the lessons to students' needs, in order to enable them to become more autonomous learners inside and outside the classroom.

Keywords: *differentiation strategies, learner autonomy, EFL teachers, mixed-ability, EFL classes*

1 Introduction

This research was based on the idea that nowadays English language is being used elsewhere as an international language. In addition to this, "the use of English in international settings also requires participants to be open, to expect and accept otherness, and to accommodate to other interlocutors" (Illés, 2012, p.505). As a result, it is required from the lecturers to enable their students to become independent learners, who can survive themselves in unique circumstances because if learners are only dependent on their teachers, they will not be ready to function independently in the real world. In addition, Illes (2012) claims that since English is being used as a lingua franca among people from different language and cultural backgrounds then "the task of language education is [...] to help learners develop self-reliance and autonomy, which will enable them to communicate successfully in international settings" (p. 506).

Furthermore, this study focuses on DI strategies that teachers should apply in their teaching in order to foster autonomous learning. The connection of DI with learner autonomy (LA) is recognized by other authors too, who state that "instead of interpreting differentiation as differentiated teaching, the idea of differentiation led straight to the idea of learner autonomy" (Trebbi, 1987 cited in Trebbi, 2011 p.102). Consequently, in this study some useful suggestions are given of combining both approaches in EFL classes in order to achieve success in both teaching and learning process. In EFL classes, the importance and need for supporting autonomous learning is of a vast importance so as to help students get confident during their studies and in their future professional engagement too.

2 Literature Review

An important notion that should be taken into consideration regarding autonomous learning is that "learners - of whatever background culture - are already able, at least to some degree, to exercise control over their own learning (Smith, 2003 cited in Smith, 2008, p.396). As a result, teachers should support students' ability for autonomous learning by offering choices for them. To help students work at their own pace the "teaching to the middle" or "one-size-

fits-all" approach is not suitable because students get "bored, disengaged, and unsuccessful", but teachers should offer various learning opportunities and this could be achieved through DI strategies (Haddaway, 2010).

Furthermore, Trebbi supports Haddaway's idea that each student learns in a unique way and thus more choices should be offered to students to help everyone learn, by stating that

it is still a widely accepted view that not all students are able to learn foreign languages, that language subjects are theoretical and academic. There seems to be a vicious circle where students fail because foreign languages are not made accessible to all students and where the dominance of failure serves as a confirmation of the view that the subject is only suitable for selected students (Trebbi, 2011, p.103).

Therefore, teachers should be aware that since subjects are not designed specifically for each learner, then their classes should be differentiated to suit the needs of every learner and to foster their autonomy and learning through differentiated tasks.

Likewise, the learners can be aided in their learning if teachers at the same time apply differentiated strategies and strive to foster their autonomous learning by combining both strategies, which put the learner needs in center. Subsequently, as Holmes & Ramos, (1991) claim "in order to help learners to assume greater control over their own learning it is important to help them to become aware of and identify the strategies that they already use or could potentially use" (cited in James & Garrett, 1991: 198, cited in Thanasoulas, 2000, para 1). Additionally, it is obvious that at any degree, "individual learners differ in their learning habits, interests, needs, and motivation, and develop varying degrees of independence throughout their lives" (Tumposky, 1982, cited in Thanasoulas, 2000, para. 1).

2.1 Defining Differentiation and Learner Autonomy

Since it was stated that DI and LA strategies are interlinked and combining them would assure success in students' learning, therefore

some definitions of both strategies will be provided. As Tomlinson (2001 cited in Hall, Strangman, & Meyer, 2003) states, "differentiated instruction (DI) is a teaching theory based on the premise that instructional approaches should vary and be adapted in relation to individual and diverse learners in classrooms" (p.2). Our classes are populated with learners with different needs and in order to reach all learners, it is required from teachers to vary their instruction. Moreover, according to Tomlinson et al., 2003 (cited in Sousa & Tomlinson, 2011, "students will engage more fully with learning and will learn more robustly when teachers proactively plan with their differences – as well as their similarities" (p.8).

On the other hand, there is the learner autonomy concept, regarding which the leading practitioners had developed the so called 'Bergen definition' which views learner autonomy as "a capacity and willingness to act independently and in cooperation with others, as a social, responsible person" (Dam et al. 1990: 102 cited in Smith, 2008, p. 396). This statement supports Tomlinson's concept on differentiation that we should perceive students as unique individuals by considering both their differences and similarities, and thus helping them learn in cooperation with others by putting them in the same class. Furthermore, "autonomy is seen to offer learners (for example an enhanced ability to make independent decisions about their learning)" (Lamb & Reinders, 2008; Benson, 2011 cited in Borg & Al-Busaidi, 2013, p. 283).

Since autonomous learning takes into consideration learner's needs and necessities, in that way learners will be enabled to make right decisions about their learning. As a result, learners will get the knowledge that is truly beneficial to their present and future needs. This notion is also reinforced by differentiated instruction principles which support the idea that in DI classrooms, students are enabled to take "increasing responsibility for their own growth" and also be "active in making and evaluating decisions" (Tomlinson, 2001, p. 5).

Additionally, the goals of both approaches are compared in order to show the similar ways in which they function. Firstly, differentiated instruction provides various approaches to "(1) content – input what students learn; (2) process – how students go about making

sense of ideas and information; and (3) product – output, how students demonstrate what they have learnt” (Tomlinson, 2001, p. 4). Moreover, the following definition of learner autonomy by Moore (n.d) LA relates to the three DI approaches mentioned previously. Therefore, it is stated that “an autonomous learner takes responsibility for his/her own learning” and also it is further claimed that “they can identify their learning goals (what they need to learn), their learning processes (how they will learn it) and how they will evaluate and use their learning”(Moore, n.d. Conceptualising Learner Autonomy in Higher Education section).

3 Research Question and Methods of Data Collection

3.1 Research question

The research question that guided this study and was used as a baseline for gathering data was: *How do EFL lecturers at SEEU Tetovo, Macedonia, implement components of differentiated instruction (student interest, assessment, lesson planning, content, process and product) to foster autonomous learning?*

3.2. Participants and Instruments

The participants who took part in this study, conducted in the winter semester 2013, were 20 EFL lecturers from SEEU. In order to gather the necessary data, the teacher questionnaires (See Appendix 1) were used. The questionnaire consisted of 26 questions related to participants' level of Implementation of DI strategies that used a four-point Likert scale labeled: *hardly ever/never do this; sometimes/have used on a few occasions; frequently use this; use intentionally and often.*

3.3. Methods of data collection

The survey used for collecting the data consisted of questions related to participants' level of implementation of differentiated instruction in regards to the six categories (*student interest, assessment, lesson planning, content, process and product*) as identified by Tomlinson (2010, cited in Whipple, 2012). The six components identified in the

questionnaire "are the foundations, according to Tomlinson (2010), to differentiated instruction [...] and they are vital to understand when implementing DI. Therefore, it will be crucial to uncover teachers' implementation of each component" (Whipple, 2012, p.41). This study unveils the results of the research that was focused on determining the EFL lecturers' level of implementation of well-established DI strategies proposed by Tomlinson.

4 Data Analysis

Since the results of this study were gathered by a survey study, therefore a quantitative approach was used to gather the data about implementation of DI strategies. The analysis provided a calculation of descriptive statistics showing frequencies for each response. Each category was analyzed and calculated separately, by creating tables for each category and then comparing the data.

5 Discussion of Results

After the data was gathered, then the focus was to discover which of the six categories (student interest, assessment, lesson planning, content, process and product) was more frequently used by EFL lecturers. The results showed that content as a category was implemented more frequently by lecturers. Then comes the category under lesson planning, which was selected as the second most frequently implemented category by lecturers. The next three categories which are assessment, product and process had very close results. Finally, the least implemented category was student interest. The findings of the study showed that EFL lecturers at SEEU generally used the DI strategies in their teaching, but some of them were implemented more and others less, therefore, the lecturer should always endeavor and be challenged to use all the strategies equally in order to meet students' individual needs and in that way foster learner autonomy as well.

The results of the level of implementation of DI strategies by EFL lecturers were calculated separately based on the various com-

ponents included in the questionnaire (student interest, assessment, lesson planning, content, process and product) and their sub questions. The results are shown numerically and they represent the most frequently and intentionally used components by lecturers as shown in the following table:

Components	Response count for the highest scales (frequently use this and intentionally use this)
Content (Questions:15-18)	66 items were chosen which are either frequently or intentionally used
Lesson Planning (Q:10-14)	56 items - either frequently or intentionally used
Assessment (Q:5-9)	50 items - either frequently or intentionally used
Product (Q:23-26)	49 items - either frequently or intentionally used
Process (Q:19-22)	47 items - either frequently or intentionally used
Student Interest (Q:1- 4)	43 items- either frequently or intentionally used

Table 1. The Six Components of DI: Implementation of DI Strategies

5.1 Discussion of Results of DI categories

With the intention of providing a more accurate and detailed explanation for each of the five categories included in the questionnaire, each component was analysed separately as well as the results found were discussed and supported by a related literature. A more comprehensive description of the level of application of each category included in the questionnaire is given in the next sections.

1.2 Content

Content, as a teaching component is considered as a very important element by scholars and thus Tomlinson and McTighe (2006) make a strong statement about the importance of content (Whipple, 2012 p.99). Moreover, Tomlinson (2010) defines content as, “the knowledge, understanding, and skills we want students to learn” (cited in Whipple, 2012 p.98). Moreover, Whipple (2012) states that DI focuses on using “varied methods to achieve the same content” (p.98).

The present research shows that content was rated the highest implemented category by EFL lecturers at SEEU. An average item rating for content was 66 out of 80. This is a positive characteristic since content is perceived as an important category by other researchers too.

5.3 Lesson Planning

Almost all successful lessons are associated with an effective lesson plan, whereas in a differentiated lesson it is suggested that a differentiated lesson plan is used. In order to meet the criteria of a well- designed DI lesson plan, it is required that when teachers are planning their lessons they acknowledge Vygotsky's (1987) theory of zone of proximal development as well as Howard Gardner's (1983) theory of multiple intelligences. As a result “students may have to overcome some obstacles before learning new concepts” (Gardner 1983, cited in Whipple, 2012, p.100). Moreover, when planning a lesson the focus should be to “teach towards all learning styles and to identify varied materials” (Whipple,2012 p. 100).

The findings of this study show that lesson planning is rated the second according to its implementation by teachers. An average item rating for content was 56 out of 100. This means that since teachers are careful about lesson planning they should also take into consideration students' different learning styles which should be acknowledged while planning the lesson.

1.3 Assessment

The category of assessment is another important component that should be taken into consideration in a DI lesson. It is stated that “assessments are used throughout the implementation of DI and are the driving force behind the specific instruction provided. When teaching with the philosophy of DI in mind, teachers are asked to pre-assess students and provide formative assessments throughout the learning” (Whipple, 20012, p.101). Also, students’ learning styles should be considered during assessment.

The present study shows that the components of assessment are ranked the third by getting 50 out of 100 scores. As a consequence, more focus should be paid to assessing students based on the given criteria because assessing throughout a lesson is important in order to determine students’ abilities to learn the content and to determine the next steps (Whipple, 20012).

1.4 Product

Traditionally, teachers have tended to use a summative assessment to check students’ level of understanding. However, there are different approaches to assessing product as suggested by Tomlinson. She states that “a product is not something students generate in a single lesson or as a result of an activity or two. Rather, it is a rich culminating assessment that calls on students to apply and extend what they have learned over a period of time” (Tomlinson, 2010 cited in Whipple, 2012 p.15).

The results of this study show that product was placed the fourth in the list of the categories implemented by SEEU EFL lecturers. An average item rating for product was 49 out of 80. The result is close to assessment and it shows that teachers try to pay attention when varying the product. However, they should pay attention to other components too because if they fail in some aspects then there may not be a high level of understanding for the students.

5.6 Process

Process can be referred to the “sense-making activities” students engage in order to “retain, apply, and transfer content” (Tomlinson & Imbeau, 2010, cited in Whipple, 2012, p. 101-102). Students should be encouraged to get actively involved in completing the tasks and not to memorize them. Vygotsky believed, as stated by Miller (2002), “Process is more important than product (for example, correct or incorrect answers) [...] because during the learning process, learners “thinking is advanced” (cited in Whipple, 2012 p.102).

This study reveals that process was ranked as the second from the last implemented category by lecturers and got 47 out of 80. As a result, if teachers strive to actively engage everyone during the process, they should not only plan their lessons well and focus on the content, as they already do but they should also differentiate the tasks and adapt their lessons to each individual's needs.

5.7 Student Interest

The last category discussed is student interest. Using student interest when teaching is a vital component to differentiated instruction because “when student interest is engaged, motivation to learn is heightened, and learning is enhanced” (Tomlinson, 2010, p. 16 cited in Whipple, 2012 p.102). Carol A. Tomlinson (2010) suggests that “teachers understand student culture, individual student life situations and students’ learning abilities and disabilities. In addition, teachers should acknowledge students’ personal experience as those factors can lead to teaching towards individual interests, which can allow for further learning.” (cited in Whipple, 2012 p. 102-103).

The results acquired from this category are concerning because student interest was one of the least implemented component of DI, and it is placed last. An average item rating for student interest was 43 out of 80. Furthermore, if teachers are not so much aware of their students’ interests, it will have an influence on students’ learning because they will be disengaged in the lessons, feel uninterested and unmotivated being in class that does not suit their needs and interests. However, if the lesson is adapted to students’ interests,

then the students will find the lesson useful, will be more attentive and will engage more fully since their motivation can be heightened by working on tasks that are in accordance with their interests.

6 Conclusions and Recommendations

This study provided useful findings related to the research question on the implementation of DI strategies that can be used to foster learner autonomy. It was concluded that out of the six categories suggested by Tomlinson, in their teaching, the lecturers mostly implemented the items under content and least implemented item was the student interest. It is recommended that lecturers take more training courses on DI in order to enhance their knowledge and develop strategies to increase teachers' effective implementation of DI, which will help them meet individual students' needs and in that way support autonomous learning. Moreover, the results of this research will be useful for fostering both DI and LA approaches because although the questionnaire was focused on the level of implementation of DI strategies (student interest, assessment, lesson planning, content, process and product), they are closely linked to the goals set by LA. Based on the results of the study, SEEU lecturers will enhance LA because if they focus on the implementation of the strategies suggested by Tomlinson, they will achieve their aim of having independent and autonomous learners.

The goal of this study was to discover if EFL lecturers at SEEU implemented the DI methods and strategies in their classrooms. Moreover, the study proved successful in realizing that teachers used the DI strategies in teaching, but it should be done proactively in order to support students' diversity and at the same time promote autonomous learning. Hopefully, the data gathered from this research will help inform professional development and increase support for teaching staff which will definitely be not only useful for teacher professional development but for students' success too.

Resources

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APPENDIX 1

Teacher Questionnaire: Implementation of Differentiated Instruction
Please read the questions carefully and accurately answer the following items by putting a tick next to each item to indicate the level of use of differentiation strategies. Your participation is voluntary, confidential and greatly appreciated!

Student Interest					
		Hardly ever /Never do this	Sometimes /Have used on a few occasions	Frequently use this	Use intentionally and often
1	I know individual student interest and can relate it to instruction.				
2	I know individual student culture and expectations and can relate to instruction.				
3	I know individual student life situations and how it may impact their learning.				

4	I am aware of student's learning disabilities and handicaps and how to address them in lessons so as not to impair their learning.				
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Assessment

		Hardly ever/N ever do this	Sometimes /Have used on a few occasions	Frequently use this	Use intentionally and often
5	I pre-assess students before instructing.				
6	I pre-assess readiness to adjust the lesson.				
7	I assess during the unit to check understanding.				
8	I assess at the end of the lesson to determine knowledge acquisition.				
9	I determine student's learning styles.				

Lesson Planning

		Hardly ever/N ever do this	Sometimes /Have used on a few occasions	Frequently use this	Use intentionally and often
10	I teach up by assuring each student works towards their highest potential.				
11	Materials are varied to adjust to students' reading / interest abilities				
12	Learners play a role in designing/selecting learning activities.				

13	I adjust for diverse learner needs with scaffolding, tiering instruction & provide student choice in learning activities.				
14	I provide tasks that require students to apply and extend understanding.				
Content					
		Hardly ever/N ever do this	Sometimes /Have used on a few occasions	Frequently use this	Use intentionally and often
15	The curriculum is based on major concepts and generalizations				
16	I clearly articulate what I want students to know, understand and be able to do.				
17	I use variety of materials other than the standard text.				
18	I provide a variety of support strategies (organizers, study guides, study buddies).				
Process					
		Hardly ever/N ever do this	Sometimes /Have used on a few occasions	Frequently use this	Use intentionally and often
19	The pace of instruction varies based on				

	individual learner needs.				
20	I use learner preference groups and/or learning preference centers.				
21	I group students for learning activities based on readiness, interests, and /or Learning preferences.				
22	The classroom environment is structured to support a variety of activities including group and/or individual work				

Product

		Hardly ever/N ever do this	Sometimes /Have used on a few occasions	Frequently use this	Use intentionally and often
23	I provide multiple modes of expression in the final product.				
24	I provide students with the choice to work alone, in pairs or small group.				
25	The product connects with student interest.				
26	I provide variety of assessment tasks.				

Adapted from Whipple, Kerri Ann, "Differentiated instruction: a survey study of teacher understanding and implementation in a southeast Massachusetts school district" (2012). *Education Doctoral Theses*. Paper 61.

Igballe Miftari / SUT

The concept of learner autonomy - A focus on metacognitive reading strategies at University level

Abstract

Learner autonomy as a concept “erupted” as a necessity of defining the shift from traditional teaching to interactive teaching i.e the shift from teaching to learning (from teacher- to learner). The process hereby takes into consideration factors that help foster and maintain better learning, self-motivated learning and helps learners’ in the discovering of who they actually are, what they actually like and how they learn best. According to Jacobs & Farell (2001) “The concept of learner autonomy...emphasizes the role of the learner rather than the role of the teacher. It focuses on the process rather than the product and encourages learners to develop their own purposes of learning and to see learning as a lifelong process.” (Retrieved March 27, 2014, from TESL – EJ: Teaching English as a second or foreign language: <http://tesl-ej.org/ej17/a1.html>)

More specifically, the point of actually knowing ones preferences in learning, on one hand helps the teacher and on the other, the learner. The part where the learner actually has control over his/her own learning is stress-free for both the teacher and the learner. The teacher is no longer under the spotlight and the learner has now more self-confidence. When academic learning is considered, I believe that the learners already have their own styles of learning, in this case, strategies of reading. The teachers should be those that actually allow that kind of learning take place. In this paper, I will emphasize firstly the awareness of learner autonomy and its’ role in the learning process, the role of different metacognitive reading strategies and how they should be applied in teaching, student motivation, self-evaluation and different outcomes of the learning process. This research will be based on former research in the field and on personal experiences concerning the issue. I hope that the findings and conclusions make a change in the overall awareness of English teachers in the region and make a path towards further investigation in the near future.

Keywords: learner autonomy, metacognitive strategies, awareness, learning styles, self-evaluation etc.

1. Introduction

1.1 Learner autonomy- what is it?

“You cannot teach a man anything; you can only help him find it within himself” Galilea Galilei (1564-1642)

While democracy is the issue in political leadership around the world, the same term is often used to refer to teaching. This matter is not new in terms of ESL-EFL classroom instruction, which have progressively moved from old to new, from “dictatorship” to “democracy”, from teacher-centered to student-centered learning. This type of teaching nowadays refers to teacher and learner awareness, to their attitudes and types of learning and teaching and to their different or same assumptions in the process. When we think about this process a bit more, we find that the term autonomy is not only the “how I teach” but is also the “how I learn best and why” and once we take this into consideration, a whole new adventure in teaching will begin. I once came across an article which described learner autonomy as being “first and foremost, a mindset, a way of thinking about learning as a journey, where you decide where to go and how to travel...” (Reinders, H. 2004 ret. April 1, 2014 on www.innovationinteaching.org). If we think of it as so, then the learner would be the traveler and we would be the tour guide, assisting only when needed or asked for. This relationship amongst both the learner and the teacher would then be that of a collaborator, because both would assist the other when needed. A tourist for e.g. will normally have read more about the attractions of the specific place and can normally ask the tour guide to see those specific places. The tour guide should of course always be prepared to fulfill the tourists’ needs and requirements. As you may conclude, this is how the relationship should be in the classroom, i.e. the teacher and the learner should assist each other in the journey of learning.

Dickinson (1993) states that autonomy is a situation in which the learner is totally responsible for all the decisions concerned with his/her learning and the implementation of those decisions. She also states that autonomous learners are capable of selecting appropriate

learning strategies and making use of them; they are able to self-access, to assess their use of different strategies, and to evaluate their own learning (Dickinson, 1993, pg. 330-31).

Again we come to the conclusion that the matter of autonomous learning is a two-way process: the teacher must know the learners well in order to adopt for them the material and also to ensure that learners can put to use their personal assumptions in the learning. If the teacher is not aware of the influence that those simple decisions can make in the process and allow the learners to partake in the lesson, then autonomy is normally not achieved. This issue, as we will see later in the paper, is time consuming, requires flexibility, much patience and is challenging.

1.2 Definitions of "autonomy" in learning

Many researchers in the field have indeed tried to "construct" a one and best meaning and definition regarding autonomy. They have only concluded that, each one of them has a personal saying, a way of saying it and a way of putting together the most relevant parts of autonomous learning. They coincide, but are not the same. They are different simply because as individuals, we are all different. We are a variety of people thinking in a variety of ways, assuming that each of us is closest in giving the best definition, for putting "the cherry on the top." I want us to think of how our learners think, act and behave, how they answer questions and how they make remarks. Two students may supply similar answers, but they can never be completely the same; for on the contrary, they have copied the others answer. As teachers, we should therefore take these differences as normal and as positive, and put into use our students' suggestions: "autonomy is essentially a matter of the learners' psychological relation to the process and content of learning...a capacity for detachment, critical reflection, decision-making and independent action. (Little, 1991, pg.4)

According to Benson & Voller (1997, pg.2) the term autonomy has come to be used:

- 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 own learning;

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

Autonomy is strongly tied to a learners' capacity. Benson (2001) states that „autonomy is the capacity to take control of one's own learning (Benson, 2001, p.75) i.e learners initiate and manage their own learning, set their own priorities and goals and attempt to link them together with their own will and abilities in order to enhance better learning. What does he refer to with capacity? I myself understood "capacity" as linked to autonomy through learners' ability, desire and freedom. Autonomy will therefore not function if as teachers we do not promote freedom of choice and if we do not stimulate our learners to use their personal skills. Each learner has a different capacity and is better at a certain skill (some may be better at communicating, others in reading or creative writing for e.g.). The ability to put to use this capacity (knowledge) requires desire and freedom. If we push our students in the wrong direction, we can push away their inner desire to interact and make suggestions, not giving them the right for freedom or autonomy: "autonomy is a process, not a product i.e. one does not become autonomous; one only works hard towards autonomy. (Author unknown). Holec (1988) describes this case as follows: ... "just as the ability to drive a motor vehicle does not necessarily mean that whenever one gets into a car, one is obliged to take the wheel, similarly the autonomous learner is not automatically obliged to self-direct his learning, either totally or even partially. The learner will make use of his ability to do this only if he wishes and if he is permitted to do so by the material, social and psychological constraints to which he is subjected." (Holec, 1988, pg.8)

1.3Learner autonomy and the metacognitive strategies concept

Once learners become aware of the role of autonomy in learning and the capacities that they now know they possess, they should find out what strategy leads them to this success. Reflecting on ones' learning and the effectiveness of that strategy is referred to as "metacognition" i.e. awareness of one's own thinking processes is generally referred to as *metacognition* or *metacognitive awareness* (Pressley & Afflerbach, 1995; Rivers, 2001). This metacognitive awareness is important because it leads to planning and preparation as to how to complete a task, monitoring ones' success, reflecting and self-evaluating the outcomes of task completion. The learner is actively part-taking in the process and as a main component is now auto-critical. The learner is now capable of focusing on the main elements of relevance in effective learning (own effective learning). Metacognitive strategies are defined by Singhal (2001, pg.156) as:

... behaviors undertaken by the learners to plan, arrange, and evaluate their own learning. Such strategies include directed attention and self-evaluation, organization, setting goals and objectives, seeking practice opportunities, and so forth. In the context of reading, self-monitoring and correction of errors are further examples of metacognitive strategies. Regarding learning foreign languages, the learner must adopt metacognitive strategies that vary according to the skill, since learning takes part through the usage of all four skills, that of listening, reading, writing and speaking. Each and every skill requires a different approach, an approach that is suitable and different for every individual. The issue of "individualism" is especially important at university level. I argue that this is an important fact that most teachers should know because each and every learner brings with them prior knowledge and has a personal assumption as to what interests them most.

1.4 Metacognitive academic reading strategies

Reading as a skill requires foremost interest and passion, creativity and imagination; it requires deep vocabulary knowledge and prior experience with books. In reading especially, the learner should be able to identify the different metacognitive strategies that are most suitable for them.

Clarke and Silberstein (1977) and Coady (1979), described reading as an active process of text comprehension in which the reader uses background knowledge and appropriate strategies, such as previewing text, using contextual clues or making inferences. According to Chan (2003): "poor readers score lower than good readers in using all reading strategies, and especially in using sophisticated cognitive and metacognitive strategies ... The awareness and the use of cognitive and metacognitive strategies are closely related to the efficiency of the reading process. (2003, pg.177). i.e learners that know how to value and use metacognitive strategies are those that score higher marks and understand text better than poor readers. At university level, students are required to read different texts, passages and novels and to either submit reports or seminar papers or to actually present it as a group or individual project. Some metacognitive strategies concerning reading are: centering the reading (linkages with previous knowledge, objectives and goals), arranging and planning, evaluating/self-monitoring. Singhal (2001), within the broader context of general reading strategies, defined specific reading strategies as:

- **Cognitive reading strategies** used to manipulate the language that include note-taking, summarizing, paraphrasing, predicting, analyzing and using context clues.
- **Memory reading strategies**, which are techniques used to assist the learner to recall information, such as word association and semantic mapping.
- **Compensation reading strategies**, such as 'inferencing', and guessing while reading, which can assist the learner in making up for reading deficiencies.
- **Affective reading strategies**, which include self-encouraging behaviour to lower anxiety, such as rewarding oneself for reading efficiently.
- **Social reading strategies**, involving collaborating with peers, for example, to ask questions, seek help or correction and to get feedback while reading.

Paris and Jacobs (1984) state that "skilled readers often engage in deliberate activities that require playful thinking, flexible strategies,

and periodic self-monitoring ... novice readers often seem oblivious to these strategies and the need to use them. (1984, pg. 2083).

2. A study with students- Austen's "Pride and prejudice"

"It is a truth universally acknowledged that a single man in possession of a good fortune must be in want of a wife..." (Pride and Prejudice) J. Austen

My personal assumption regarding reading is that students must enjoy it and like it firstly in order to actively participate. Even though the issue of autonomous teaching and learning is now very popular, one must not forget that certain school policies are those that are obedient to the ministry of education and therefore must establish the teaching in accordance to the set of predispositions and requirements. At university level for e.g. it is known that the four-year English field of studies has a pre-plan program that consists of many subjects, involving of course that of English literature. Students begin with old, medieval English literature and continue with Shakespeare, following Marlow, Johnson, D.H. Lawrence, Elliot etc. Imagine the stress students learning a foreign language, that are pursuing their bachelors in English language and literature face during their first year of studies! Since I am co-teaching in the subject of literature myself these semesters, I designed a questionnaire for my students regarding metacognitive reading strategies and their assumptions of autonomous learning. The questionnaire consisted of 15 questions, divided into 3 parts: the first part (5 questions) referred to students' knowledge regarding learner autonomy, the second part (5 questions) referred to students' concept of metacognitive strategies, and the last part (5 questions) referred to students' self-reflection/evaluation strategies (see table 1-3) Participants were 50 intermediate leveled university students, 25 male and 25 female between the ages of 20-21. The main aim of the study was to collect some primary data in order to further elaborate the issue of metacognitive thinking/awareness at university level.

Table 1. Students' learner autonomy awareness

➤ Do you know what learner autonomy means?
➤ Do you think your personal assumption regarding your learning is

important?

- Do teachers help you put to use these strategies?
- Do teachers consult you when making the syllabus?
- Have you found autonomous learning effective?

Table 2. Students' metacognitive reading strategies

- When text becomes difficult, you re-read it.
- You guess the unknown words from the context.
- You base the text upon previous knowledge.
- You base assumptions on the title.
- You continue reading even when text becomes boring.

Table 3. Students' self-reflection/evaluation strategies

- You were able to understand most text.
- Your personal suggestions/ideas were right.
- Your English has improved.
- You enjoy your literature class and find reading interesting.
- Your vocabulary has improved.

2.1 Data collection/ results discussion

The study was only the beginning (first stage) of autonomy awareness research, for I find it a really interesting issue and want to further elaborate it. The study was based on Austen's novel "Pride and prejudice" which students were supposed to read during the previous semester. I began the lesson by writing the famous quote on the board and the title and asked the following questions:

1. What do you understand from this sentence?

What do you think prejudice means?

Do you personally agree with the opening line? Why or why not?

What do you think of the title?

Students all gave their personal comments. We then made a round-table discussion regarding first-impressions and prejudice, for this would be a central point in the novel. We proceeded with an excerpt and at the end students were assigned to read the novel and submit a paper the following week. Surprisingly, more than I had expected actually did read it and brought in the homework! I asked

them why they had taken it so seriously, for this was a rare experience, especially when reading the whole book was required. They all had the same response: they had enjoyed supplying ideas and commenting and simply wanted to find out if they were right. I took this as an opportunity to ask them about learner autonomy and if they wanted to help me assign other books for them to read and if they would like to help me re-design the syllabus? They were so excited and interested in the matter. After a month, I designed the questionnaire as a reflection towards the assumptions they had now developed. Since the answers were with short yes/no responses, it was easy to get to the point of understanding and to calculate the results.

Table 1. Learner Autonomy awareness results

Q1. Do you know what learner autonomy means?	380	120
Q 2. Do you think your personal assumption regarding your learning is important?	50	0
Q3. Do teachers consult you when making the syllabus?	25	25
Q4. Do teachers help you put to use these strategies?	10	40
Q5. Have you found autonomous learning effective?	42	8

Regarding the first part, learner autonomy awareness, the outcomes for question nr. 1 were that most of them, 38/50 understood the term, regarding question nr.2 all 50 replied with "yes", regarding question nr. 3, 25/50 answered with "yes", regarding question nr. 4, 40/50 answered with "no", regarding question nr. 5, 42/50 replied with "yes". As you may conclude, most students thought that they were not consulted enough as to "what" they needed to learn and "how" they wanted to learn, even though they found autonomous learning effective. The obtained results from part 1 conclude that most teachers were not aware of the importance of involving students in the process as "active" participants.

Table 2. Metacognitive reading strategy results

Q6. When text becomes difficult, you re-read it	30	20
Q 7. You guess the unknown words from the context.	42	8
Q8. You base the text upon previous knowledge.	25	25
Q9. You base assumptions on the title.	45	5
Q10. You continue reading even when text becomes boring.	20	30

Regarding part 2, students' metacognitive reading strategies, the results concerning question nr.6, 30/50 re-read text when it became difficult, regarding question nr. 7, most students 42/50 guessed the unknown words from context, regarding question nr. 8, 25/50 actually based text upon previous experience, regarding question nr.9, 45/50 based their assumptions on the title, regarding question nr.10, 20/50 would actually continue reading even after the text had become boring. Overall results are that students lack previous experience with texts and that most of them would not continue reading if the text became boring.

Table 3. Student self-reflection strategy results

Q11. You were able to understand most text.	30	20
Q 12. Your personal suggestions/ideas were right.	40	10
Q13. Your English has improved.	47	3
Q14. You enjoy your literature class and find reading interesting.	40	10
Q15. Your vocabulary has improved.	45	5

The last part of questions regarding students self-reflection strategies resulted as follows: regarding question nr. 11, 30/50 students actually understood most text, regarding question nr. 12, 40/50 replied with positive answers, which means they had actually guessed correctly, regarding question nr. 13, 47/50 agreed that their English proficiency had improved from reading, regarding question nr. 14, 40/50 replied positively regarding English literature classes, and regarding question nr. 15, 45/50 replied with "yes" meaning that they had enriched their vocabulary.

3. Limitations of the study

I am aware of the fact that this study contains either too much or too little information concerning the issue of learner autonomy and metacognitive reading strategies, because putting together this puzzle in only 10 pages, is truly difficult. I agree that one does not know "how much to focus on what", though I have tried to include a bit of everything. Also, the study is only in its' first phase and needs further elaboration, which I plan to do in the near future. The number of participants might not be enough, though this was the

number of students in the class of literature and I based it specifically on them and their assumptions. The questionnaire as an only instrument of measurement might also be insufficient, though it was worth the effort and I hope that those that will read it will find it useful in some way.

4. Conclusions and further recommendations

The research proved to be very useful in terms of helping learners change their point of view regarding autonomy in general and metacognitive strategies. Many learners may lack self-confidence or awareness of the capacities that they possess, and the teacher should always be there to "guide them in their path of achievements." During the years of teaching, I have learned that students want to give advice and suggestions and simply want to be heard. As autonomous teachers, we should allow for this to take place. We should know how to make a distinction between what interests who and allow them to choose for themselves how they will complete the task. Knowing where we stand can make a huge difference in the lives of our students, in the way they communicate with us and the world. We can only sit back and relax and point out the guidelines. I am more than sure that they will complete every mission and task with great success, for the key of success is valuing who we are, what we represent and how this variety makes learning easier. I highly recommend teachers to enhance and accept autonomous learning.

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Learner Autonomy in Language Learning: University Students' and Professors' Views and Suggestions

Abstract

Learner autonomy is one of the most discussed issues in the field of foreign language acquisition (FLA) thus it has become an essential point for many academics and researchers nowadays. The aim of this paper was to investigate students' and teachers' attitudes towards autonomous learning. It answered three questions: (1) What autonomous activities do students undertake while learning English?; (2) What are students' beliefs about their role and their teachers' role in the practice of autonomous learning?; and (3) What are teachers' perceptions of learner autonomy in language learning? The participants involved in this study were 50 graduate students and 10 professors at South East European University in Tetovo, Macedonia. The findings were analyzed through a mixed methodological design throughout a student questionnaire (quantitative approach) and teacher interview (qualitative approach). The findings implied that learners showed good results in being aware in their learning, their self-effort, broader autonomous activities, self-esteem, use of reference materials, motivation, and use of technology in learning. Also, students perceived their role as a significant element in learning. Correspondingly, the teachers were also highly optimistic towards autonomous learning.

Keywords: learner autonomy, teachers, students, perceptions, language learning

1. Introduction

Learner autonomy has become a central concern of many scholars in the recent history of language teaching through a focus on learner reflection and taking responsibility for one's own learning processes. However, language teachers worldwide struggle with the ways to promote learner autonomy or at least to encourage the idea of autonomy in language classrooms. Many case studies and a lot of research has been conducted on this issue which have clarified the notion and concept of learner autonomy. Correspondingly, the purpose of this study was to analyze university professors' and students' views about learner autonomy in education.

2. Literature Review

Many researchers have come up with appealing and useful definitions and findings in the field of LA. Holec (1981) defines LA as the ability to take charge of one's learning by determining the objectives; defining the contents and progressions; selecting methods and techniques to be used; monitoring the procedure of acquisition by properly speaking; and evaluating what has been acquired. Additionally, Dam (1990, cited in Gathercole, 1990), perceives autonomy as learner's readiness and capability to manage his/her own learning. To be more specific, Dam, like Holec, believes an individual becomes autonomous learner when he/she independently chooses aims and purposes and sets goals; chooses materials, methods and tasks; exercises choice and purpose in organizing and carrying out the chosen tasks; and chooses criteria for evaluation.

Little (1991) continues with a definition of LA as a capacity for detachment, critical reflection, decision-making, and independent action, whereas Dickinson (1987) views autonomy as a mode of learning; one in which the individual is responsible for all the decisions connected with his/her learning, and undertakes the implementation of these decisions. However, Kenny (1993) gives a broader definition and sees it as the "opportunity to become a

person", not only the freedom to learn. It refers to all the decisions and activities of independent learning.

Autonomy is further discussed by Frieire (1996) who perceives it as the learners' capacity and freedom to construct and reconstruct the taught knowledge. Furthermore, it is Hedge's (2000, p. 410) claim that autonomy is "the ability of the learner to take responsibility for his or her own learning and to plan, organize, and monitor the learning process independently of the teacher". Autonomous learning, thus, spreads beyond a social context.

As Benson and Voller (1997) emphasize, the term LA comes to be used at least in the following five ways: situations in which learners entirely study on their own; a set of skills which can be learned and applied in the self-directed learning; an inborn capacity which is suppressed by institutional education; the exercise of learners' responsibility for their own learning; the right of learners to determine the direction of their own learning.

Correspondingly, Reinders (2010: 46-49) looks at ways teachers can encourage autonomy in the classroom and proposes the following stages in the development of learner autonomy: identifying needs, setting goals, planning learning, selecting resources, selecting learning strategies, practice, monitoring progress, and assessment and revision.

3. Present study

Outlined below are the results of the authors' survey of students' and professors' views and suggestions regarding learner autonomy in language learning, undertaken during the winter semester 2013.

3.1 Research questions

Question 1: What autonomous activities do students undertake while learning English?

Question 2: What are students' beliefs about their role and their teachers' role in the practice of autonomous learning?

Question 3: What are teachers' perceptions of learner autonomy in language learning?

3.2 Methodology

Fifty undergraduate students from all departments at SEE University-Tetovo, Macedonia aged between 18 and 21 years participated in this survey; they all attended BSE at the Language Center. Also, ten professors teaching at all departments at the same university participated as well.

3.3 Instruments

The findings were analyzed through a mixed methodological design consisted of a student questionnaire (quantitative approach) and a teacher interview (qualitative approach) in order to provide more objective and reliable results regarding the investigated subject matter.

3.4 Procedure

Students were given the student questionnaire (adapted from Joshi, 2011) which was divided in two sections and 9 subheadings (see Appendix 1). The first section *Autonomous Learning Activities and Plans* was conducted in order to answer the first research question (*What autonomous activities do students undertake while learning English?*) This section consisted of 7 subheadings such as: learner awareness; self-effort, broader autonomous activities, self-esteem, use of reference materials, motivation, use of technology in learning.

The second section *The Learners' Perceptions of the Roles in Learning* was conducted in order to answer the second research question (*What are students' beliefs about their role and their teachers' role in the practice of autonomous learning?*) and it consisted of two subheadings such as: learners' perceptions of their own roles, and learners' perceptions of teachers' role.

The adapted teacher interview (see Appendix 2) investigated the third research question (*What are teachers' perceptions of learner autonomy in language learning?*) The interview sheet consisted of eight questions related to: significance of autonomous learning, autonomy - proficiency interlink, factors directing independent learning, performance differences, autonomous learning for examination, the teacher's role, assessing autonomy, and suggestions to the learners.

3.5 Analysis and discussion of the findings

3.5.1 Findings from Students' questionnaire (Research Question #1)

The autonomous activities that students undertake while learning English are presented in Table 1 below. In terms of *Learner Awareness*, the majority of students believe that they sometimes have the ability to learn English well. They sometimes make decisions and set goals of their learning, and make a good practice of their free time in studying English. Regarding *Self-Effort*, the majority of students rarely preview before class and they sometimes try to use every opportunity to take part in the activities where and when they can speak in English in class. The majority sometimes speaks confidently in front of people and they often make notes and summaries of their lessons. Regarding *Broader Autonomous Activities*, the majority of the students sometimes use library to improve their English and they often use audio-visual materials to develop their speech such as: listen to BBC, watch English movies, read English newspapers etc. In terms of *Self-esteem*, the majority note their strengths and weaknesses in learning English and improve them. As regards *Use of reference materials*, the majority sometimes revises lessons and seeks the reference books. On the subject of *Motivation*, the majority of students often reward themselves when they make progress in learning and in terms of *Use of technology* they always use internet and computers to study and improve English.

	Items	Never	Rarely	Some times	Often	Always
	Learners' Awareness					
1	I think I have the ability to learn English well.	0	0	20	14	16
2	I make decisions and set goals of my learning.	0	0	22	20	8
3	I make good use of my free time in studying English.	5	14	20	11	0
	Self-Effort					

4	I preview before the class (i.e. see summary, lessons etc.).	4	20	16	16	0
5	In the class, I try to use every opportunity to take part in the activities where and when I can speak in English.	4	6	16	16	8
6	I speak confidently in front of the people.	15	7	20	4	4
7	I make notes and summaries of my lessons.	4	4	14	24	4
8	I talk to the teachers and friends outside the class in English.	14	36	0	0	0
	Broader autonomous activities					
9	I practice English outside the class also such as: record my own voice; speak to other people in English.	15	21	7	7	0
10	I use library to improve my English	8	10	22	6	4
11	I use audio-visual materials to develop my speech such as: listen to BBC, watch English movies, read English newspapers etc.	0	9	9	22	10
12	I attend different seminars, training courses, conferences to improve my English.	34	10	0	6	0
13	I take risk in learning the English language.	20	10	14	3	3
	Self-esteem					
14	I note my strengths and weaknesses in learning English and improve them.	0	7	7	24	12

	Use of reference materials					
15	I revise lessons and seek the reference books.	2	10	26	10	2
16	Besides the contents prescribed in the course in the course, I read extra materials in advance.	29	7	7	7	0
	Motivation					
17	When I make progress in learning, I reward myself such	3	0	5	24	18
	as: buy new things, celebrate, parties, etc.					
	Use of technology					
18	I use internet and computers to study and improve English.	0	0	6	8	36

Table 1. Findings from Students' Questionnaire regarding the first research question

Findings from Students' questionnaire (Research Question #2)

Students' beliefs about their role and their teachers' role in the practice of autonomous learning are presented in Table 2 below. In terms of learner's perceptions of their own roles, the findings show that the majority of the students agree that students have to be responsible for finding their own ways of practicing English. They also agree that they should use much self-study materials to learn English and have to evaluate themselves to learn better. Moreover, they strongly agree that students should build a clear vision of their learning before learning English. On the other hand, learners' perceptions of teachers' role are that the majority are undecided whether a lot of learning can be done without a teacher. They also agree that teachers have to be responsible for making students understand English. Moreover, they strongly agree that teachers should point out the students' errors, and they not only have to teach 'what' but should also teach 'how' of English. The majority of students agree that teachers have to provide exam oriented notes and

materials; need to use their authority in teaching/learning if needed; the student-teacher relationship is that of raw-material and maker. However, they disagree that the failure of the students is directly related to the teachers' classroom employment.

	Items	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly Agree
	Learners' perceptions of their own roles					
19	Students have to be responsible for finding their own ways of practicing English.	0	4	18	28	0
20	Students should use much self-study materials to learn English.	0	4	0	26	20
21	Students have to evaluate themselves to learn better.	0	4	10	24	12
22	Students should mostly study what has been mentioned under the course because studying English course is actually for exam purpose.	5	27	3	15	0
23	Students should build clear vision of their learning before learning English.	0	8	0	14	28
	Learners' perceptions of teachers' role					
24	A lot of learning can be done without a teacher.	0	8	30	12	0
25	Teachers have to be responsible for making students understand	4	4	14	28	0

	English.					
26	Teachers should point out the students' errors.	0	5	5	10	30
27	Teachers not only have to teach 'what' but should also teach 'how' of English.	4	0	6	6	34
28	Teachers have to provide exam oriented notes and materials.	0	0	9	31	10
29	The failure of the students is directly related to the teachers' classroom employment.	3	24	20	3	0
30	Teachers need to use their authority in teaching/learning if needed.	0	4	14	28	4
31	The student-teacher relationship is that of raw-material and maker.	0	7	7	22	14

Table 2. Findings from Students' Questionnaire regarding the second research question

Findings from Professors' Interview (Research Question #3)

Regarding the first question on the teacher questionnaire (*How do you take autonomous learning in learning English?*), professors believe that autonomous learning is independent learning where learners take responsibility for their own learning. It is the ability and practice of learning by oneself, particularly in unstructured opportunities. It is, as they say, 'learning to learn how to learn.' Moreover, autonomous students are those who actively seek out ways of improving and widening their knowledge rather than

passively following the teacher's instructions. It is teacher's ability to facilitate learning and not to act only as a source of information. Furthermore, autonomous learning of any language is subject to the language being learnt. It would be easier in a language with a phonetic alphabet rather than English, for example, which requires more listening and live correction of pronunciation. Autonomous learning in the classes of the professors interviewed is realized by having students in the center. The teacher in those cases functions as a facilitator and students are taking the responsibility and work individually on the personalized activities.

As regards the second question (*Do you think that the students who are more autonomous in learning have higher proficiency?*), professors generally answer positively but they believe there are always exceptions. According to them good learners take responsibility for their own learning and use many language learning strategies. Professors also believe that there are individuals who need the guidance of a teacher and yet can attain quite high proficiency through this method. There are professors who think that there is not a strict equivalence. Some highly motivated students may start with average proficiency but improve quickly. In general, they believe that more autonomous students take more courage to try things on their own and similarly, they would be more courageous to use the language even if they make mistakes. Since speaking leads to better proficiency, the analogy would be more autonomy resulting in higher proficiency, and they believe that proficiency level requires a lot of self-discipline.

In response to the third question (*What do you think are the factors/ things that direct such independent learning or self study?*), professors believe that the factors that direct such autonomous learning are teaching and learning context, motivation, previous education, different methods which promote learner autonomy (diary, portfolios, reflection papers, etc), persistence (some people get frustrated and give up in autonomous settings, whereas others continue and figure out the correct answer). Moreover, the availability of materials is another significant factor (someone with access to the internet will likely have more opportunities to hear or

read a target language than someone who does not have computer access). There are also personal and social factors. Some students are naturally more self-disciplined and organized and these are the ones who can be truly autonomous. However, social factors come into play – study environment, career goals and ambitions, family support, teacher input. All of these can assist students to learn independently. It has to be learnt and promoted from very young age. Furthermore, there are claims that the first factors are the parents, the education at school and at home, then the teachers, the genetic predisposition as well (linked to introvert/extrovert character). Professors also believe that there must be strong personal goals that necessitate a certain command of English, for example, moving to another country or getting promoted. However, sometimes there is a genuine infatuation with the culture that promotes this type of learning. If the students possess the strategies and techniques of autonomous learning then they can apply those techniques in the learning process. The teachers should also teach students about those techniques in order to help them become independent learners.

Regarding the fourth question (*What differences do you find between the autonomous and non-autonomous learners regarding their performance?*) professors believe that autonomous learners find answers to different questions by themselves. They tend to be people who enjoy challenges and who do not give up when faced by difficulty or adversity. Autonomous students are careful to make sure they understand each task and assignment and once they know what they need to do, they will do it, without need of further prompting. They are also more ethical since they know that by plagiarizing, they undermine their own progress and learning. Autonomous learners are more involved in learning and take more initiatives because they possess the strategies that enable them to achieve that. On the other hand, non-autonomous learners rely heavily on their teachers. They tend to be very focused on structures, which can indeed help in the study of grammar, but this focus tends to make them stop when confused, instead of trying to discover the correct answer or approach. Non-autonomous learners are inclined to do the

minimum necessary to pass, without reference to whether they are really learning or progressing. This can be very frustrating especially with intelligent students. Non-autonomous learners are more passive, they need more support and additional instructions.

In response to the fifth question, (*Do you think that this sort of activities have any connection with exam results in the department?*) some professors claim that learner autonomy promotes independent learning but not necessarily leads to better results. Others believe that the more autonomy achieved, the better the overall exam performance will be. Also, there are claims that it depends on the type of exam. For instance, non autonomous learners can also score well on exams that test memorization or drills.

In terms of the sixth question (*What do you think that a teacher's role in such learning should be?*) professors believe that teachers have the most important role in promoting learner autonomy but they should first be autonomous themselves. Usually, a teacher is a role model for his/her students but this depends very much upon the subject. Most of the time the best thing a teacher can do is to encourage independent thought and to communicate his or her own enthusiasm for the subject. This may not, however, be entirely appropriate for a subject like syntax, which really requires a good deal of rote learning. The teacher is a facilitator and he/she must provide support both in the classroom and (crucially) between classes. In general, teachers should be there available for consultations, respond to e-mails and use LIBRI (Learning Management System) effectively. Autonomous learners often don't feel the need to consult the teacher. However, if they do, it doesn't mean they're not autonomous. Taking responsibility for one's learning involves checking in with your teacher whenever necessary. A teacher should encourage this type of student to seek information and learning opportunities outside of class.

In response to the seventh question (*How do you assess whether the learners are autonomous or not?*) professor claim that this is achieved through looking at students' readiness to cooperate with the others, their willingness to carry out tasks outside the classroom and those who use different language learning strategies. Also, by

attempting to discover independent thought in their work (it is exceptionally dispiriting to see work that merely replicates what the teacher has said in class but when a student disagrees with what the teacher has said, and can support his or her argument logically, this indicates that some degree of learner autonomy has been achieved). Other professors, do this informally by observing how individual students behave (if they take their own initiative and not only wait for teacher's instructions), if they are ready to experiment with the language (use it even if they are not sure about the answer), if they have their own way developed through the years about how to make the learning easier.

As regards the eighth question (*What would you like to suggest those learners of English who much depend upon the teachers and the classroom lectures or notes? And what about the autonomous learners?*), professors believe that students need initial training to become independent learners because it cannot happen in one day. To the other group of learners, professors believe that students should continue to "search" different methods which promote learner autonomy. However, there are professors that claim that it is possible to fetishize learner autonomy. Although it is certainly encouraging when one encounters it, some people generally learn better with structured, teacher-led work. The attainment of the target language is the important result and how students get there is up to them. Again, using the teacher's learning aids doesn't mean lack of responsibility. Of course, some students are 'needy' and cannot do anything on their own. Most students have a degree of independence, but they will still follow the teacher's guidelines and use whatever resources are in circulation. Professors believe that students should try to be more actively involved with their own learning, not to be lazy, and to use the language as much as possible in any other setting and not only the classroom. For example, to read in English, watch TV in English, listening to songs in English. Some professors encourage their Academic English students to develop both styles of learning, but that isn't necessary in all cases. If they are doing BE (Business English) with a high-ranking executive, for example, note-taking may not be a skill to develop. They would

suggest that dependent learners are taught some strategies that would help them become more independent, they should be given activities with everyday situations where they can see that in many cases they cannot rely on others but should have things under their control. Autonomous learners should be supported and not hindered from succeeding only because they do not want to rely much on others.

5. Conclusions

Adopting a combined methodological design and analyzing the data collected through a questionnaire and a semi-structured interview, it was found that the learners made a good practice of autonomous activities. For instance, they used internet and computers to study and improve English, and noted their strengths and weaknesses in learning English and improved them. Moreover, they used audio-visual materials to develop their speech and they tried to use every opportunity to take part in the activities where and when they could speak in English in class. Also, they revised lessons and sought the reference books, and used the library to improve their English. A good use of their free time was made in studying English, and students spoke confidently in front of people.

Students viewed their role as an important factor in learning. The majority of them agreed that they should use much self-study materials to learn English, and build clear vision of their learning before learning English. Also, they agreed that students have to evaluate themselves to learn better, and they have to be responsible for finding their own ways of practicing English. On the other hand, when asked about teachers' role, students agreed that teachers have to provide exam oriented notes and materials and should point out the students' errors. According to them, teachers not only have to teach 'what' but should also teach 'how' of English. Teachers need to use their authority in teaching/learning if needed, and have to be responsible for making students understand English. However, students disagreed that students should mostly study what has been mentioned under the course, and that the failure of the students is directly related to the teachers' classroom employment. Students seemed to be undecided regarding the claim that a lot of learning can be done without a teacher.

The teachers embraced autonomous learning as well. Hence, they suggested the learners to be autonomous. Therefore, it can be concluded that suggesting methods of promoting learner autonomy is indeed suggesting methods of promoting teacher autonomy, as teachers' autonomy affects learners' autonomy (Johnson, Pardesi and Paine, 1990, cited in Gathercole, 1990).

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Appendices

Appendix 1

Learner Autonomy Survey Questionnaire (for the students)

Personal Profile

Please give your personal information as asked.

Name:

Age:

Gender:

Address:

Study Year:

Department:

Part I: Autonomous Learning Activity Scale

A = Never	B = Rarely
C = Sometimes	D = Often
E = Always	

This scale is meant to know about your own independent learning activities and plans that you adopt for learning English language. Please give a tick () to the answers according to your true cases.

S.N.	Autonomous Learning Activities and Plans	A	B	C	D	E
1.	I think I have the ability to learn English well.					
2.	I make decisions and set goals of my learning.					
3.	I make good use of my free time in studying English.					
4.	I preview before the class (i.e. see summary, lessons etc.).					
5.	In the class, I try to use every opportunity to take part in the activities where and when I can speak in					

	English.						
6.	I speak confidently in front of the people.						
7.	I make notes and summaries of my lessons.						
8.	I talk to the teachers and friends outside the class in English.						
9.	I practice English outside the class also such as: record my own voice; speak to other people in English.						
10.	I use library to improve my English.						
11.	I use audio-visual materials to develop my speech such as: listen to BBC, watch English movies, read English newspapers etc.						
12.	I attend different seminars, training courses, conferences (e.g. NELTA) to improve my English.						
13.	I take risk in learning the English language.						
14.	I note my strengths and weaknesses in learning English and improve them.						
15.	I revise lessons and seek the reference books.						
16.	Besides the contents prescribed in the course, I read extra materials in advance.						

17.	When I make progress in learning, I reward myself such as: buy new things, celebrate parties etc.						
18.	I use internet and computers to study and improve English.						

Part II: Evaluation-Sheet for Perception of the Roles

This section requires your true perceptions about the role of a teacher and that you think of yourself in learning English. Please circle the answer that you think is the best.

1 = Strongly Disagree 2 = Disagree

3 = Undecided 4 = Agree

5 = Strongly Agree

19. Students have to be responsible for finding their own ways of practicing English.

strongly disagree	1 2 3 4 5	strongly agree
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Students should use much self- study materials
20.to learn English.

strongly disagree	1 2 3 4 5	strongly agree
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Students have to evaluate themselves to learn
21.better.

strongly disagree	1 2 3 4 5	strongly agree
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22.Students should mostly study what has been mentioned under the course because studying M. Ed. English course is actually for exam purpose.

strongly disagree	1 2 3 4 5	strongly agree
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23. Students should build clear vision of their learning before learning English.

strongly disagree	1 2 3 4 5	strongly agree
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A lot of learning can be done
24. without a teacher.

strongly disagree	1 2 3 4 5	strongly agree
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Teachers have to be responsible for making students understand
25. English.

strongly disagree	1 2 3 4 5	strongly agree
-------------------	-----------	----------------

Teachers should point out the
26. students' errors.

strongly disagree	1 2 3 4 5	strongly agree
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Teachers not only have to teach 'what' but should also teach 'how'
27. of English.

strongly disagree	1 2 3 4 5	strongly agree
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Teachers have to provide exam oriented notes
28. and materials.

strongly disagree	1 2 3 4 5	strongly agree
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The failure of the students is directly related to the teachers'
29. classroom employment.

strongly disagree	1 2 3 4 5	strongly agree
-------------------	-----------	----------------

Teachers need to use their authority in teaching/learning if
30.needed.

strongly disagree	1 2 3 4 5	strongly agree
-------------------	-----------	----------------

The student-teacher relationship is that of raw-
31.material and maker.

strongly disagree	1 2 3 4 5	strongly agree
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Appendix 2

Interview Question-Sheet (Only for the Teachers)

1. How do you take autonomous learning in learning English?
2. Do you think that the students who are more autonomous in learning have higher proficiency?
3. What do you think are the factors/ things that direct such independent learning or self study?
4. What differences do you find between the autonomous and non- autonomous learners regarding their performance?
5. Do you think that this sort of activities have any connection with exam results in the department?
6. What do you think that a teacher's role in such learning should be?
7. How do you assess whether the learners are autonomous or not?
8. What would you like to suggest those learners of English who much depend upon the teachers and the classroom lectures or notes? And what about the autonomous learners?

Luiza Zaqiri / SEEU

The Influence of Foreign Language Anxiety on Learner Autonomy

Abstract

Based on learner's various types of motivation and the presence of psychological factors, the success of language acquisition can vary from one learner to another. Foreign language anxiety is one of the many factors which can interfere with learning a foreign language by hindering learner autonomy. Thus, the purpose of this paper is to investigate the impact of foreign language anxiety on learner autonomy. The participants in this study were 17 students at South East European University. Qualitative and quantitative approaches were used for the data collection. The instruments used were: student questionnaires, classroom observations, unstructured student interviews and students' performances. Students with an evident level of foreign language anxiety found it more difficult to become autonomous learners and they did not achieve very good final results. It was also evident that collaborative work helped students become more autonomous. Creating an environment where the students learned the language laughing and enjoying, was proven very effective towards promoting learner autonomy. Most importantly, students who were continuously provided with positive and productive comments were less affected by anxiety and were more autonomous learners.

Keywords: foreign, language, anxiety, learner, autonomy

1. Introduction

Promoting learner autonomy in education is essential in order to have long lasting and effective student outcomes. However, FLA¹ is

¹ Foreign Language Anxiety

an obstacle which can prevent students from becoming autonomous learners. The fear of making mistakes in a foreign language makes them more dependent on their teachers, peers, books and other resources. Moreover, as a result of the presence of fear students are not willing to take risks and engage themselves in decision making processes.

1.1 Theoretical and practical importance of the present study

The results of this paper will be of a big importance for the Language Centre and for the LCC² Faculty, in South East European University, because methods how to promote learner autonomy are going to be examined and suggested. Helping learners become autonomous is very useful because from this the learners won't benefit only during their English class (the present study), but they can use these skills even in their other subjects and their everyday interactions with other people.

1.2 Purpose of the study

The purpose of this study is to provide evidence and support to the learners who find it difficult to become autonomous learners because they suffer from language anxiety. It also demonstrates and analyzes authentic student experiences and practices.

2. Literature review

The following are some results and conclusions made from other researchers who have conducted research related to learner autonomy and foreign language anxiety. To start with Gabriela Ladrón de Guevara de León (2010), who claims that learner autonomy is very important because it gives students the opportunity to experience different ways in which they can handle problems in their lives and in this way they do not learn the language only, but more than that (sec. 5).

According to Boud, (1988), Kohonen, (1992) and Knowles, (1975) (as cited in "What is Learner Autonomy and How Can it be Fostered?" by Thanasoulas, D. 2002, sec. 2) the students who are independent and practice autonomy are more active learners, they

² Faculty of Languages, Cultures and Communication

brainstorm and are "pro-active" and do not respond only when they are asked by their teachers, but also take their own initiatives.

Another researcher who has conducted research about learner autonomy is Little, D. (2004) who says that when we make our students autonomous learners we at the same time are preparing them to be critical and responsible people not only in the classroom, but also in their social life and later even contribute to "the development of democracy" (p.124).

Moreover, in order for students to be aware of learner autonomy and to easily accept it they should have an autonomous teacher. De Vries and Kohlberg (1987, p. 380) as cited in Balçıklanlı, C. (2010) define an autonomous teacher as follows:

The autonomous constructivist teacher knows not only what to do, but why. She has a solid network of convictions that are both practical and theoretical. The autonomous teacher can think about how children are thinking and at the same time think about how to intervene to promote the constructive culture. Autonomous teachers do not just accept uncritically what curriculum specialists give them. They think about whether they agree with what is suggested. They take responsibility for the education they are offering children. (p.91)

Furthermore, Mouche (2010) in his study explores the influence of FLA on learner autonomy and concludes that FLA has an influence on the learning outcome because the best learners developed encouraging attitudes about learning a language, they were also more positive about their skills and about the way in which they cope with learning. Next, Mouche (2010) states that these students became autonomous learners and were willing to participate in different activities. On the other hand, Mouche (2010) adds that: "negative self-perception aptitude results in less effective strategies and leads to discouragement, crucial disengagement, poor cognitive and oral performance, low grades, anxiety and a negative attitude to autonomy" (p.19).

Other researchers, Hauck, M. & Hurd, S. (2003) in their study "Exploring the link between language anxiety and learner self-management in open language learning contexts" state that, for most of the learners, a language class was the subject where they would

feel more anxious rather than any other subject. The results from their study showed that students had the most difficulties when trying to express themselves in a foreign language because they were afraid that they might be misunderstood (p.NA).

According to Horwitz, K., Horwitz, B. & Cope (1986) foreign language anxiety is "a distinct complex of self-perceptions, beliefs, feelings, and behaviours related to classroom language learning arising from the uniqueness of the language learning process" (p. 128).

Finally, it is important to mention some of the symptoms of foreign language anxiety according to Horwitz, Horwitz & Cope (1986). These symptoms are: "apprehension, worry, even dread" other symptoms which are mentioned are: "difficulty concentrating, becoming forgetful, sweat, and palpitations" (p. 126).

3. Methodology

3.1 Research questions

The following are the research questions developed to help the researcher receive relevant results.

#1. Does Foreign Language Anxiety have an influence on learner's spoken performance?

#2. Does teacher motivation help students who suffer from Foreign Language Anxiety to improve their oral performance?

#3. How does foreign language anxiety interfere with learner autonomy?

3.2 Participants and setting

The participants in this study were 17 first year female students at the Faculty of Languages, Cultures and Communication at South East European University, more specifically at the Language Centre in Tetovo. They were attending ESP (English for specific purposes) for Communication Sciences (2) course. The data was collected during the academic year 2012/13.

3.3 Instruments and data collection

Instruments used were in the form of student questionnaires (see appendix A), unstructured student interviews, student performances and teacher evaluation of the process (classroom observations). The instruments were created by the researcher. Qualitative and

quantitative approaches were used for the data collection. A qualitative approach was used to evaluate the students' performance and their engagement as autonomous learners. Then, a quantitative approach was used to find out the number of students affected by foreign language anxiety and its impact on promoting or inhibiting learner autonomy. Unstructured interviews were conducted with all the students to determine the level of FLA. Some of the used interview and questionnaire items were inspired by Horwits, Horwitz & Cope (1986) "Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale" (a very detailed and effective questionnaire) and some questions were taken or adapted from von Wörde's, R. A (2003) questionnaire.

4. Procedure

Students had to give presentations in front of their colleagues. They had to deliver two individual presentations and a group presentation. The students were observed and graded at the end of their presentations. Peer feedback and teacher feedback was given to the students and they were continuously encouraged and motivated by their teacher. Moreover, the symptoms of FLA were identified and noted properly by the teacher and by their peers.

5. Results and discussion

5.1 Results and discussion related to the first research question:

#1: Does Foreign Language Anxiety have an influence on learner's spoken performance?

5.1.2 Response to the first questionnaire item: *How do you react if you make any mistake in any given task?*

The following are three representative responses from students who were affected with FLA:

Student A: [I get very nervous and most of the time I feel confused and I am worried how I could make a mistake like that].

Student B: [I start feeling even more under stress].

Student C: [I can't stop the tears rolling].

Whereas, the students less affected with FLA were quite more positive and calm. This shows that students who feel anxious

and suffer from foreign language anxiety cannot control their feelings, but become even more anxious in front of an audience.

5.1.3 Response to the second questionnaire item: *How do you think your audience/colleagues will react if you make a mistake during your presentation?*

The following are reactions from students who suffered from FLA:

Student B: [I hope they won't make faces or say things that will make me feel worse].

Student C: [Some who don't like me maybe will start laughing].

Student D: [They will think I haven't learned my presentation].

Next, these are two representative answers from students who had a minimum level of anxiety:

Student A: [I think that they will see it like a normal thing and they will say it to me after I finish my presentation].

Student B: [I ignore the distractions from the audience; I want to finish my presentation successfully].

This shows that students who are affected with foreign language anxiety worry about what the others will say, they start thinking about the consequences (how their colleagues will react if they make mistakes).

5.1.4 Response to the third questionnaire item: *Do you have enough self-confidence when you speak in English?*

The students who were not affected by FLA looked very self-confident during their presentations. They reported that even if they made a mistake they wouldn't have stopped their presentations. The same results were evident from their performances. It was demonstrated that students who were confident and independent could speak fluently. Six out of 17 students were under stress in the beginning of their speeches, but later they gained confidence. Whereas, the four students who had a severe level of anxiety even after they finished presenting successfully said that they were [terrible presenters].

5.1.5 Response to the fourth questionnaire item: *How do you react if you have a difficult assignment?*

This question was designed to see if FLA will stop the students becoming autonomous learners. The following are two answers given from students.

Student A: [I try to be quiet, think positive and then find a solution].

Student B: [I worry a lot, I think what's going to happen, what's going to be next].

From this it can be assumed that the students who took further initiatives to find a solution to a problem were mostly those who were self-confident and not anxious. Whereas, the students who were affected by foreign language anxiety needed more time to prepare for the assignment.

5.2 Results and discussion for the second research question:

#2: Does teacher motivation help students with severe to moderate levels of Foreign Language Anxiety to improve their oral performance?

5.2.1 Response to the fifth questionnaire item: *Have your teachers played a role in your feelings about your speaking ability in an English class?*

Generally the answers were very positive. Fifteen out of 17 students said that their current teacher had encouraged them to improve their presentation skills and made them feel more relaxed when presenting in front of the class. On the other hand, one student gave an example from primary school saying that: "My primary school teacher was very nervous and he was always [screaming to us], and I still fear speaking in front of people."

Classroom observation process was another tool which was used to analyse the teacher's role in helping students become more autonomous. From the classroom observation process it was more than obvious that teacher motivation, praise, positive comments and encouragement helped the less autonomous students take initiatives, become more active and more independent. Positive comments had a big influence on the performance of the students who were afraid to present because of the fear of making mistakes.

5.3 Results and discussion for the third research question:

#3: How does foreign language anxiety interfere with learner autonomy?

5.3.1 Response to the sixth questionnaire item: *Are there any reasons which stop you participate in class?*

The following are some random answers given by some students with a moderate level of anxiety:

Student A: [I don't have this problem. I always express my ideas. However, sometimes we are afraid because our pronunciation is terrible].

Student B: [When my colleagues don't stop speaking and don't give me the turn to say something].

Student C: [Not to say something wrong].

From the students' answers it can be assumed that the reason why the students failed with their presentations was the fear not to make mistakes, not to look ridiculous in front of their colleagues. Another reason which interfered with student participation in class were the more extroverted students who were very dominant and didn't give turns to the less extroverted students to express their thoughts.

5.3.2 Response to the seventh questionnaire item: *Do you insist on finishing even a very difficult task or do you give up?*

Thirteen students out of 15 gave their best during their performances. Surprisingly, the student who was inclined to be a perfectionist and was always prepared for class was the one who was the most affected with FLA. Each time she presented she insisted to start the presentation from the very beginning because she would start panicking and forget the content of the presentation. It can be surmised that the severe level of anxiety that she had stopped her from being an autonomous learner.

5.3.3 Response to the eighth questionnaire item: *Do you do a research to find something more related to your studies?*

Twelve out of 17 students said that they usually tried to read more. However, when checked by their teacher how many of them had done research for a given task, the results were more negative.

Only a few of the more autonomous students had collected material from other sources.

5.3.4 Response to the ninth questionnaire item: *Do you like taking risks when you are in an English classroom?*

A response from a student who was not affected by FLA: [Yes, I do. Sometimes I even start talking without having a clear idea]. On the other hand a student who did not feel secure said: [No, no way. Not even in my life].

5.3.5 Response to the tenth questionnaire item: *Are you good at time management when you are given assignments by your teacher?*

Student A: [I used to be very bad at time management but now I have advanced this skill].

Student B: [Not so much. It depends from the content].

It can be hypothesised that the students who were identified as being affected with FLA were not good at time management, which is another skill which defines an autonomous learner.

5.3.6 Response to the eleventh questionnaire item: *Do you always need help from your teacher when you are doing something new in the classroom?*

The results showed that student who had self-confidence did not always ask for their teacher's help. They could start the activity on their own without further explanation. Interestingly, these students sometimes would immediately start doing the activity without even listening to the instructions from their teacher.

5.3.7 Response to the twelfth questionnaire item: *Do you enjoy working in a team or on your own? Why?*

Student A: [I enjoy working on my own, because for me it is easier to think and to make a plan in my head and then to present in front of the others].

Student B: [In a team, it's more relaxing].

The results proved that the more anxious students (less autonomous) preferred working in groups. They felt more secure working as a team. On the other hand, 12 out of 17 students preferred working on their own.

5.3.8 Response to the thirteenth questionnaire item: *Do you participate if you are not so sure you know the right answer?*

As mentioned earlier 5 out of 17 students who were more anxious and less autonomous students at the same time responded more negatively.

Student A: [In most of the cases, yes, I do].

Student B: [I don't participate. If I am not very sure that I know the answer, then I am not able to say it].

Student C: [No, it's better to listen to the others and learn rather than saying something brainless].

5.3.9 Response to the fourteenth questionnaire item: *Are you good at overcoming obstacles with difficult tasks.*

The students who were highly motivated and more relaxed responded positively to this question. Whereas, the students who were less autonomous said that they wouldn't even try to find a solution. Moreover, the same results were in correlation with their performances. These students always wanted to postpone their presentations or not to present at all. They didn't even worry about the percentage that they would have reduced from the overall points of their grades.

Student A: [Most of the time yes. I always try to find a window to pass through it, so I connect some topics and at the end there are results].

Student B: [I always try].

From the classroom observations it was evident that majority of the students tried to improve their speaking skills. However, there was one case when a less autonomous student even refused to do the first presentation, but successfully delivered the second presentation.

6. Conclusions

6.1. Conclusion for the first research question

#1: Does Foreign Language Anxiety have an influence on learner's spoken performance?

Based on the results of this paper it can be deduced that students with lower level of FLA were more self-confident. They did not look nervous while presenting and the FLA symptoms were not very obvious. The same students also received better grades at the end of the presentations. Students who were not affected very much with

the fear of speaking in front of the class were ready to take more risks. Students with lower level of FLA preferred to work on their own and were more autonomous learners. The same results were evident from the questionnaire answers given by the students. As more autonomous learners they could manage to overcome obstacles when dealing with difficult tasks.

Students with higher level of FLA most of the time needed their teacher's help, they wanted to read from their notes, they had less or no self-confidence, they preferred working in groups, had poor final results and didn't like taking risks. These students were very quiet and more introverted; they rarely spoke and had visible symptoms of FLA.

6.2 Conclusion for the second research question

#2: Does teacher motivation help students who suffer from Foreign Language Anxiety to improve their oral performance?

Teacher motivation helped the students perform better. All the students showed better results on their second presentations. They were more confident and fluent. It was clear that teacher motivation had a profound effect on the students' success. There were cases when students gave up and stopped presenting but with the help of their teacher they managed to deliver their presentations. From the classroom observation it was concluded that only four students had a poor performance. The students showed better results, after teacher motivation.

Therefore it can be suggested that teachers should make the students feel more self confident and encourage positive feelings. Moreover, the teachers should assign students task which will make them work together and collaborate, which is in correlation with Strange, S. (2012, p.4) suggestions. Most importantly, students should be continuously provided with positive and productive feedback in order to reduce the anxiety levels and promote learner autonomy.

6.3 Conclusion for the third research question

#3: How does foreign language anxiety interfere with learner autonomy?

Finally, the results of this study demonstrate that the majority of the students, 12 out of 17, were autonomous learners. They were

self-confident, they preferred individual work and liked risk taking. They continued speaking even when making mistakes during their presentations or speeches. They were doing individual research and looking for other sources to gain more information.

From this it was obvious that the presence of higher level of foreign language anxiety is harmful if we want our students to become autonomous learners. It can be concluded that students with an evident level of foreign language anxiety found it more difficult to become autonomous learners and they did not achieve very good final results.

7. Limitation of the study and recommendations

This paper has its own limitations. Firstly, it has a limited number of participants and therefore it's difficult to generalise from the results, yet, it provides very useful suggestions from students' authentic experiences. Secondly, it examines the effects of foreign language anxiety on becoming autonomous learners only on female learners. It is important to note that this study does not focus on foreign language anxiety and the manifested symptoms, but it examines the influence which foreign anxiety has over autonomy in learning.

Since it is not a study conducted only with students suffering from foreign language anxiety it allows us to see which female students are more likely to become more independent and autonomous learners. Further research can investigate different methods and techniques which can reduce anxiety and promote learner autonomy. Moreover, comparative studies can be conducted on the same topic, but with male and female participants.

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Appendix A

Student questionnaire

1. How do you react if you make any mistake in any given task?
2. How do you think your audience/colleagues will react if you make a mistake during your presentation?
3. Do you have enough self-confidence when you speak in English?
4. How do you react if you have a difficult assignment?
5. Have your teachers played a role in your feelings about your speaking ability in an English class?
6. Are there any reasons which stop you participate in class?
7. Do you insist on finishing even a very difficult task or you give up?
8. Do you do a research to find something more related to your studies?
9. Do you like taking risks when you are in an English classroom?
10. Are you good at time management when you are given assignments by your teacher?
11. Do you always need help from your teacher when you are doing something new in the classroom?
12. Do you enjoy working in a team or on your own? Why?
13. Do you participate if you are not so sure you know the right answer?
14. Are you good at overcoming obstacles with difficult tasks?

Different Approaches for Learner Autonomy in Higher Education

Abstract

Learner autonomy in the last few decades has been considered one of the ultimate goals in education in general, particularly in language learning.

An autonomous learner can be considered that student who has developed some learning strategies and is able to control their own method of learning. In the case of learning language learners, students need to know how to learn, as well as what to learn. Having a repertoire of learning styles and strategies can help students become better, more creative and autonomous learners. The purpose of this paper is to show a few examples of learning strategies and styles, which support autonomous learners in their studies. The main goal of strategies and instructions is to make the students more aware of the effectiveness of their learning, and also to help students consciously control how they learn so that they can be efficient, motivated, and independent language learners.

Researchers have identified and named many learning strategies. A few have been defined as "right" and "wrong" learning strategies, but specific ways of organizing and using certain ones can be useful for different teaching situations, mainly those used in higher education.

Key words: learner autonomy, higher education, learning strategies, instructions, language learning, etc.

What is Learner Autonomy and How Can It be Defined?

1. Introduction

Learner autonomy has become a topic of interest and discussion over the last two decades and also a phrase for many studies within the context of language learning. Learner autonomy in language learning is nothing new, but in the last twenty years it has had significant influence on English learning, be it English as a Second Language (ESL) or English as a Foreign Language (EFL).

Learner autonomy in its own field undertakes the positive outcomes at the university level, such as flexibility, adaptation, self-initiative and self-direction. This paper deals with the ways and many innovative forms and flexible approaches that support and encourage learner autonomy in every education system nowadays. Many ways and disciplines have proven themselves as positive, which are shown or prove that are useful in designing for learning generally, including virtual and physical places

Regarding the issue of learner autonomy, it has been claimed that it promotes democratic educational societies, prepares individuals for a lifelong learning process, is a human right, and provides the best opportunity for learners to use their creative ideas in and out of the classroom.

One of the key principles of learner autonomy is moving the focus from teaching to learning, taking the teacher out of the spotlight and pointing it at the learners. This may seem not very improbable to new teachers, or even experienced teachers who have been the centre of attention and in control of their classroom. However David Little wrote:

"I believe that all truly effective learning entails the growth of autonomy in the learner as regards both the process and the content of learning; but I also believe that for most learners the growth of autonomy requires the stimulus, insight and guidance of a good teacher" (*Little, 2000*).

Learner autonomy also means giving the learner a choice for creativity in both input and output.

2. Theoretical Background

There currently exists extensive literature about learner autonomy, which is important to this field and can provide a very good, comprehensive study of the issues of learner autonomy, giving key points, analysis and results.

For a definition of autonomy, we might quote Holec (1981: 3, cited in Benson & Voller, 1997: 1) who describes it as “the ability to take charge of one’s learning” On a general note, the term autonomy has come to be used in at least five ways (see Benson & Voller, 1997: 2):

- for situations in which learners study entirely on their own;
- for a set of skills which can be learned and applied in self-directed learning;
 - for an inborn capacity which is suppressed by institutional education;
 - for the exercise of learners’ responsibility for their own learning;
 - for the right of learners to determine the direction of their own learning.

It is noteworthy that autonomy can be thought of in terms of a departure from education as a social process, as well as in terms of redistribution of power attending the construction of knowledge and the roles of the participants in the learning process. The relevant literature is riddled with innumerable definitions of autonomy and other synonyms for it, such as independence, language awareness, self-direction, andragogy, etc., which testifies to the importance attached to it by scholars. Let us review some of these definitions and try to gain insights into what learner autonomy consists of and means. As has been intimated so far, the term autonomy has sparked considerable controversy, in as much as linguists and teachers have failed to reach a consensus as to what autonomy really is. For example, in David Little’s terms, 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" (Little, 1991: 4).
Bibl(Little, D. 1991. Learner Autonomy. 1: Definitions, Issues and Problems. Dublin: Authentik).

- It is not something done to learners; therefore, it is far from being another teaching method (ibid.). In the same vein, Leni Dam is cited (1990, cited in Gathercole, 1990: 16), bibliog. .Dam, L. 1990. Learner Autonomy in Practice. In Gathercole, I. (ed.). 1990, p. 16. CILT. Great Britain: Bourne Press.

- drawing upon Holec (1983), Holec, H. 1981. Autonomy in Foreign Language Learning. Oxford: OUP defines autonomy in terms of the learner's willingness and capacity to control or oversee his or her own learning. More specifically, she, like Holec, holds that someone qualifies as an autonomous learner when he independently chooses aims and purposes and sets goals; chooses materials, methods and tasks; exercises choice and purpose in organising and carrying out the chosen tasks; and chooses criteria for evaluation.

One element which is important to learner autonomy is student's self-assessment. Students, or more generally learners, should be able to build their own criteria for the quality of their work and also be independent and able to make judgments regarding their strong and their weak points the strengths and weaknesses of their own learning. This usually helps the learners become aware of what is their next step in their learning process, without being helped by the teacher. This means that the teacher is the person with the most experience and knowledge in the classroom, but also results in an increase in the level of knowledge and competence.

3. The Transformation from Teaching to Learning Process

"The concept of learner autonomy ... emphasizes the role of the learner rather than the role of the teacher. It focuses on the process rather than the product and encourages learners to develop their own purposes for learning and to see learning as a lifelong process" (Jacobs & Farrell, 2001).

Moving the focus from teaching to learning clearly does not mean that the teacher becomes obsolete or a total bore. It means a change of pace from a situation where lessons are organized around textbook material and the ground a teacher needs to cover. Lessons can be organized in cooperation with learners for both material and methods.

Even though moving the focus from learning to teaching might seem like a radical change, it is not impossible and has been now implemented all over the world. A teacher-student in an action research study initiated at the University of Iceland used the theory and methods behind learner autonomy in her teaching practice in a classroom at the lower secondary level of elementary school. She wanted to increase learner autonomy by creating a collaborative learning situation. The learners were given opportunities to choose and take responsibility for their own learning. They chose topics and working approaches, and formed their own groups. The learners organized themselves, decided upon homework and did final presentations. The teacher-student's role was that of a facilitator. Assessment was partly peer and partly self-assessment (Lefever, 2005).

At the beginning, learners' reactions ranged from enthusiasm to displeasure, but according to the teacher-student, the results of the experience were positive for most of the learners. The learners came to the conclusion that even though they were responsible for their own learning, the teacher also shared a part of the responsibility.

They found that they paid more attention to presentations because they were given the responsibility of giving feedback to their peers (Lefever, 2005). By moving the focus from teacher to learners, the learners became motivated and involved in their own learning and what was going on in the classroom. To fully understand the concept of autonomy and its focus on learning rather than teaching, we must take a closer look at what is entailed in both the learner's and teacher's roles. We will then shed light on what characterizes the autonomous classroom.

3.1 Learner's Role and Teacher's role

The student's role in a community or a classroom should not be that of a passive learner, as Leni Dam characterized learner autonomy by "a readiness to take charge of one's own learning in the service of one's needs and purposes". Autonomous learners are those who understand why they are learning specific topics, accept responsibility for their learning, take the initiative in planning and executing learning activities, and are willing to assess their own learning (Little, 2002). Learners' active participation in and responsibility for their own learning process are essential in the field of foreign language learning (Dam, 1995). The learner needs to be willing to "act independently and in co-operation with others, as a socially responsible person" (Dam, 1995).

The learner's role in an autonomous environment is not that of a passive receiver of information. Learners are the makers of their own fortune and valued members of a learning community that is their class. Autonomous learners have the ability and willingness to learn on their own. Learners become successful if they take responsibility for their own learning. It is up to learners if they want to learn (Lowe & Target, 1999)!

An important element to learner autonomy is self-assessment. Learners need to build up their own personal criteria for the quality of their work and develop independence from the teacher as the sole judge of their weaknesses and strengths. This helps the learners make informed decisions about their next steps in the learning process and removes dependence on the teacher. They do not have to wait for the teacher to tell them what to do next and how well they are doing. Even though the teacher remains the more knowledgeable and experienced person in the classroom, the goal is for learners to increase their knowledge and level of competence.

The teacher's role in an autonomous learning classroom is to provide the learners with the skills and ability to practice what they have learned, no matter if we are talking about a language classroom or any other course. As Leni Dam says: "Let me first of all mention

the fact that learners do not necessarily learn what we believe ourselves to be teaching... What we can do is give our learners an awareness of how they think and how they learn – an awareness which hopefully will help them come to an understanding of themselves and thus increase their self-esteem" (*Dam, 2000, p. 18*).

A big part of implementing autonomy in the classroom is to teach diverse learning strategies, and assist the learners in finding the methods that best suit them. Many researchers and scholars who deal with learner autonomy have suggested a few ways or methods which teachers should use or implement during teaching. Some of these methods which are more common are logbooks, where teachers keep track of their student's progress on the activities, a few minutes talk, use posters or other routines as homework etc, used in class, which have shown good results everywhere. All these tools should make learners become more self-sufficient and independent in the learning process. Every system of education should seek clearly to implement learner autonomy, whether as a part of language learning or other subjects, the material should be dealt with during study time.

In an autonomous classroom, teachers do not play the role of imparters of information or sources of facts. Their role is more of that of a facilitator. The teacher's position is to manage the activities in the classroom and help learners plan their learning both for long and short-term. The teacher has to be able to establish a close collaboration with the learners and make sure that all learners know what is expected of them at all times (Lowes & Target, 1999).

Teachers have the role of counselors. They need to inform learners and make them capable of choosing the best learning strategies. Learners have to be able to make informed choices. This means knowing the rationale behind the strategies and having time to experiment to find which suits best for each occasion. Teachers must, however, be careful not to guide the learners implicitly to the strategies they themselves prefer (Nunan, 2003).

A learner autonomous classroom is a place where learners and teachers have constructive interaction with each other and learn from each other. The teacher is responsible for helping learners

become aware of alternative strategies and learning styles (Camilleri, 1999).

The teacher gives praise and feedback but this is also supplied by the other learners when group work and product is jointly assessed after projects are finished. Learners then get more personal feedback and guidance from the teacher through the logbooks, which serve as a medium of communication as well as a tool of organization and reflection.

A teacher that intends to foster his learners' autonomy should not only introduce various learning strategies, but also give his learners ample opportunity to try them out in different circumstances. It is necessary to build up an atmosphere in the classroom that invites such experiments and lets learners feel comfortable sharing their findings with their teacher and their classmates. Interaction in the classroom directly influences the learners' learning processes.

4. Conclusion

Diverse assessment methods cater to the needs of a diverse group of learners, but a good place to start to introduce learners to the idea of thinking about learning. It supplies different ways of getting learners to become aware of their learning process.

There are a lot of factors which need to come together in order for learner autonomy to thrive. In Macedonia, although learners are open to more modern and active methods, the official educational policies discourage the move towards autonomy and promote more traditional methods. In other European countries, however, official educational policies encourage the implementation of learner autonomy, but teachers tend to be more conservative and stick to methods with which they are familiar. It is our belief that learners all over the world have the same capacity to embrace modern, communicative and autonomous methods despite many cultural differences.

The main change that needs to be made for learner autonomy to be implemented is a change of disposition. The whole idea of

teaching and learning needs to be revisited and reoriented. In the learner autonomous classroom, teachers must let go and learners must take responsibility for their own learning and realize it is up to them if they want to learn, and in what way. There should be no teacher who can make their students learn by threat or force because by using those methods, they will be unsuccessful and have no results.

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Teacher Perspective on Language Learning Autonomy at SEEU

Abstract

The paper opens with the most quoted and widely accepted definitions of language learner autonomy, followed by an insight into the most common reasons for fostering autonomy in language learning starting with the Bologna concepts of life-long learning and student mobility. The teacher's role in an autonomous language learning setting, which is one of the essential prerequisites for fostering language learner autonomy in higher education, is addressed in this paper. The paper also reviews relevant literature on language learner autonomy and summarizes the results and findings from a field research on language learning autonomy conducted at the Language Centre at the South East European University. The research question that guided the investigation in this study was: *How highly do Language Centre (LC) teachers think of their students' capacity of being autonomous?* This research reveals the teachers' beliefs about the value of promoting autonomy, roles and responsibilities in the learning/teaching process as well as the perceived ability and readiness of their students to accept autonomy in language learning.

Key words: defining autonomy, reasons for fostering autonomy, teacher's role in autonomous language learning setting, Language Centre at SEEU

1. Introduction

This paper accepts the premise that autonomous language learners are better language learners. An essential prerequisite for promoting autonomy among language learners is the teachers' devotion to fostering autonomy as a worthwhile goal. This paper presents and discusses the results and findings from a field research conducted

in order to reveal the beliefs about autonomy held by the teachers at the Language Centre (LC) at South East European University (SEEU), the perceived ability of their students to assume greater responsibility for the language learning process and act autonomously as well as the division of roles and distribution of responsibility in the language classroom. A big advantage of this study, which considerably increases its significance, is the fact that it can be replicated in contexts where foreign languages other than English are learnt/taught i.e. it can have a much wider application.

2. Background

2.1 Defining Language Learning Autonomy

In one of the earliest definitions of autonomy given in a report to the Council of Europe, Holec defines autonomy as “the ability to take charge of one’s own learning...to have, and to hold, the responsibility for all decisions concerning all aspects of this learning; i.e.:

- ✓ determining the objectives;
- ✓ defining the contents and progressions;
- ✓ selecting methods and techniques to be used;
- ✓ monitoring the procedure of acquisition properly speaking (rhythm, time, place, etc.);
- ✓ evaluating what has been acquired”. (in Little, 1991, p.7)

The most widely cited, classic definition of autonomy was given by David Little, recognized worldwide as a leading proponent of the theory of language learner autonomy. He defines autonomy as a *capacity* – for detachment, critical reflection, decision-making, and independent action. It presupposes, but also entails, that the learner will develop a particular kind of psychological relation to the process and content of his learning. The capacity for autonomy will be displayed both in the way the learner learns and in the way he or she transfers what has been learned to wider contexts (1991, p.5).

In Holec’s definition, taking charge of one’s own learning is described in terms of the capacity to make decisions whereas in the definition of autonomy given by Little, which is complementary to Holec’s definition, the capacity to take responsibility for one’s own

learning is described in terms of control over the cognitive processes involved in the self-management of the learning process.

Little (1991) identifies several basic misconceptions about language learner autonomy and highlights that :

- autonomy is not synonymous with self-instruction i.e. limited to learning without a teacher;
- autonomy does not require the teacher to relinquish all initiative and control;
- autonomy does not make the teacher redundant;
- autonomy attained by the students may not be destroyed by any intervention on the part of the teacher;
- autonomy is not a new teaching method / something that the teacher does to the students;
- autonomy is not a single, easily described behaviour;
- autonomy is not a steady state achieved by certain learners.

2.2 Reasons for fostering autonomy in language learning

One of the main reasons for fostering learner autonomy in higher education is the concept of life-long learning. Among other reasons for autonomy, the following would be worth highlighting : the 'information explosion' i.e. the increased quantity and quality of learning expected from the students; the increased number of students; commercialization of education (private language teaching institutions view student needs as consumer demands); the Internet and development of technology in education as a result of which students do no longer need to attend classes as well as the increased importance of language in education in general due to internationalization of business and education, migration and travel. Moreover, the communication needs of today's learners, who frequently get in contact with speakers of the target language, are by far more complex than the communication needs the learners had in the past.

2.3 Teacher's Role in Autonomous Language Learning

'Facilitator', 'helper', 'coordinator', 'counselor', 'consultant', 'advisor', 'knower' and 'resource' are the most frequently used terms to describe the teacher's role in autonomous learning setting.

Little (2009) believes that the development of autonomy in formal education cannot happen without the teacher's role which is shaped by three pedagogical principles. The first one is the principle of learner involvement. The teacher has to fully involve learners in planning, monitoring and evaluating their learning. The second principle is learner reflection. The teacher must help learners to continuously reflect on the content and process of learning and engage in self-assessment. The third principle is the principle of target language use. The teacher must ensure that the target language is both a medium and goal of learning. In Little's words "these are the things teachers have to do to create and sustain an autonomous language learning community" (Little, 2009, p.224).

1. Methods

The field research was conducted in order to determine: *How highly do Language Centre (LC) teachers think of their students' capacity of being autonomous?* The main sources of information for this study were the relevant literature on language learning autonomy and the teacher survey whereas the main data collection instrument was the anonymous questionnaire. Ideas from previous studies on autonomy such as Breeze (2002, p.34-36); Spratt, Humphreys and Chan (2002, p.265-266); Chan, Spratt and Humphreys (2002, p.17-18,) were used when designing the questionnaire. Some of the questions generated from the previously mentioned sources were reproduced for use with the South East European University teachers with all the necessary changes made. Data collected with the above stated instruments was analyzed, crossed and compared using SPSS (statistical package for the social sciences).

3.1 Participants and Questionnaire

Participants in this study were 30 Language Center English language lecturers and high lecturers with two to nineteen years of teaching experience (majority having from 6 to 9 years teaching experience). The respondents were asked to fill in the anonymous questionnaire in order to survey their views and perceptions of language learning autonomy. The participants received oral instru-

ction about how to complete the questionnaire and were encouraged to seek clarification of any ambiguous items included in the questionnaire.

The questionnaire was short but concise. It contained eight questions all in all, two open-ended and six closed questions. The questionnaire is given in Appendix A at the end of the paper.

4. Results

This section reports on the teachers' responses to the questionnaire items. Question number one was an open-ended question which asked teachers to define what language learning autonomy *is* and *is not*. Slightly less than 20% of teachers interviewed simply paraphrased question number 6 from the questionnaire (*"Students ability to do something different in class, more interesting from their point of view."*; *"...when students take initiative to do something different in terms of learning..."*, *"Students taking initiative to do activities ... in class outside of the syllabus"*; *"The capacity of being able to ask the teacher to do something else besides what's in the syllabus"*; *"Doing only what the teacher or syllabus tells you to")*.

Stating that autonomy is not *"something that can be directly taught"*; *"something that you can teach in one lesson, it needs the learners' interest and will"*; *"something that can be easily acquired"*, shows that the teachers are aware that autonomy takes time, effort and energy to develop. The number of teachers who would never entirely give up or even share their traditional responsibilities with the students (autonomy is not *"determining the objectives and the goals of the course"*) is considerably lower than the number of those who agree that autonomy is not "teacherless" learning (autonomy is not *"learning by yourself"*; *"anarchy in learning"*, *"learning on their own"*; *"leaving the learning entirely up to the students and have them make decisions they are not ready/capable to make"*, but *"... a combination of teacher's influence and students' capacity"*).

In the second question the participants were asked to decide on their and their students' responsibilities in and outside of the

language classroom. The teachers saw primarily themselves responsible for:

- stimulating learner's interest in learning English (73%)
- making learners work harder (63%)
- choosing what activities to use in class (60%) and
- deciding how long to spend on each activity (67%)

When it comes to stimulating interest in learning English, choosing the activities to use in class and deciding how long to spend on each activity the respondents would have the learners participate in the decision-making (27%, 40%, 33% respectively), but none of them would leave making these decisions entirely to the learners. This might be because they consider the students incapable of making an informed decision about the most appropriate activities to be used in class

Similarly none of the respondents placed the responsibility for identifying weaknesses in English, determining the objectives of the English course, choosing what materials to use to learn English and evaluating progress made exclusively on the learners.

Teachers interviewed considered it necessary to cooperate with the students and actively involve them in making sure they make progress during lessons (57%) and deciding what is to be learnt outside of class (67%).

Students were considered equally responsible for choosing materials to use to learn English and evaluating the progress made (50%). According to the respondents interviewed, these responsibilities were equally shared among the teachers (50%) and learners (50%).

The teachers considered themselves to be the authority which decides what should be learnt next in class (54%) whereas this percent dropped to 3% when it comes to deciding what is to be learnt next outside of class. In the case of choosing out of class learning, the teachers interviewed placed greater responsibility on the learners (67%).

In terms of making sure learners make progress during lessons, the responsibility was divided as follows: learners 3%, teachers 40%, both 57%. When asked about making sure learners make progress outside class, greatest responsibility was placed on the learner 50%,

followed by both 40% and the teacher with only 10%. The fact that the teachers (40%) were assigned the greatest responsibility about making sure learners make progress during lessons whereas the learners (50%) were assigned the same responsibility for out of class progress indicates the teachers still consider themselves the authority in class which suggests that developing and fostering language learner autonomy has to start with the teacher.

83% of the respondents interviewed thought autonomy is an ability which can be developed compared to only 17% who think autonomy is an inborn capacity.

High 70% of the respondents did not agree that language learning autonomy is another 'western' idea imposed to cultures, like ours, where it is not applicable and even higher 87% considered fostering language learning autonomy a worthwhile goal. However, when asked to report on how often the students take initiative in class, most of the answers (61%) were sometimes. 77% of the teachers interviewed rated the students they had in the semester when the survey was conducted as somewhat capable of being autonomous whereas 23% rated their students as not being capable of being autonomous at all.

The overall impression is that there are still misconceptions about autonomy in language learning which require additional clarification.

Semi- structured interviews with half of the sample surveyed i.e. about 15 out of 30 teachers, would probably clarify some of the of ambiguities and produce more conclusive data.

Detailed results of the teacher survey are presented in Appendix B.

5. Discussion

The following could be singled out as most significant findings which directly answer the research question about the teachers' perceived ability of their students to act as autonomous language learners. In general, LC teachers hold the belief that most of the responsibility and authority in class resides in the teacher. This is perhaps not surprising due to the fact that the teachers have syllabi to follow and exams to conduct.

The very fact that over half of the teachers interviewed (61%) claimed that their students only sometimes display autonomous behaviour by taking initiative in class; 77% considered their students somewhat capable of being autonomous whereas 23% rated their students as not capable of being autonomous at all, directly points to the conclusion that the LC teachers do not think highly of their students' ability to assume greater responsibility and behave autonomously.

However, when we examine the claims teachers made about the nature of autonomy (vast majority of 83% considered autonomy an ability that can be developed), its appropriateness for this culture (70% considered autonomy applicable to this culture) and the worth of fostering autonomy among language learners (expressed by 87%), it becomes abundantly clear that the teachers interviewed are in favour of autonomy in language learning. These claims are positive and encouraging for fostering autonomy among English language learners in the LC at SEEU.

6. Conclusions

The main idea behind this research was to contribute to our knowledge of autonomy, both in theory and practice. Based on the results gained from this study and the literature on language learning autonomy which was reviewed, optimistic conclusions about fostering autonomy in the context of the LC at SEEU can be drawn. It is more than evident that there is a tendency among LC teachers at SEEU to regard autonomy as desirable and achievable. Teachers at SEEU should strive to foster autonomy in their students not only to help them become independent, life-long learners but also autonomous users of the target language. For this purpose the English language programs offered by the Language Centre (LC) at the South East European University (SEEU) should insist on encouraging and developing communicative competence in the target language. The immediate, short-term goal of the LC courses should be to develop students' communication skills for purpose of study, travel, or work and study abroad as undergraduates and the future, long-term goal should be to increase students' mobility and enhance their career prospects.

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APPENDIX A Questionnaire *Teachers' views on language learning autonomy*

1. How would you define language learning autonomy?
Language learning autonomy is _____
Language learning autonomy is *not* _____
2. It is the teacher's (T), the learners' (L) or both the teacher and learners' (B) responsibility to:
 - a) make sure learners make progress during lessons T / L / B
 - b) make sure learners make progress outside class T / L / B
 - c) stimulate learners' interest in learning English T / L / B
 - d) identify weaknesses in English T / L / B
 - e) make learners work harder T / L / B
 - f) determine the objectives of the English course T / L / B
 - g) decide what should be learnt next T / L / B
 - h) choose what activities to use in class T / L / B
 - i) decide how long to spend on each activity T / L / B
 - j) choose what materials to use to learn English T / L / B
 - k) evaluate progress made T / L / B
 - l) decide what is to be learnt outside of class T / L / B
3. The concept of language learning autonomy is another 'western' idea imposed to cultures, like ours, where it is not applicable. (*please select one*)
 - a) Yes
 - b) No
4. Language learning autonomy is (*please select one*)
 - a) an inborn capacity
 - b) an ability which can be developed
5. Fostering language learner autonomy is a worthwhile goal. (*please select one*)
 - a) Yes
 - b) No
6. In my classes / lectures students
 - a) always
 - b) sometimes

- c) rarely
 d) never take initiative (i.e. openly express interest in doing something different than what is determined in the syllabus).
7. (Based on your understanding of autonomy) How would you rank the students you had this semester:
- Highly capable of being autonomous
 - Somewhat capable of being autonomous
 - Not capable of being autonomous at all
8. How long have you been teaching English?
 Years of teaching experience _____
 Thank you for your cooperation!

APPENDIX B *Results of the teacher survey*

1. How would you define language learning autonomy?

Language learning autonomy is

- "You feel autonomous learning a language if you 1) have some talent 2) love the language 3) need/use the language."*
- "When students take responsibility about their learning themselves, without anybody imposing on them."*
- "Students ability to do something different in class, more interesting from their point of view. I think that this will stimulate their interest in learning English."*
- "To be independent while learning and studying a foreign language."*
- "Accepting that you are responsible for your own learning, taking advantages of learning opportunities in class and outside of class (music, TV, conversations, advertisements)."*
- "A way of learning which is initiated by an individual in most of the cases, but sometimes it needs some leading also."*
- "Students' engagement and initiative in learning."*
- "Stimulate learners to work hard and develop adequate learning skills in class and outside class. Moreover, stimulating students to choose what materials to use to learn English according to their needs and interests as well as their levels of proficiency."*
- "The will an determination of students to develop and foster skills which allow them to learn outside the classroom and to apply what is learnt in their everyday life."*

- 10) *"The way all the learners acquire knowledge. All learners have different learning styles and are therefore different learners."*
- 11) *"The responsibility and willingness/motivation on the part of the student to take an active role in his/her learning and independence through guidance from the teacher."*
- 12) *"An ability to engage in learning activities independently and with no help from the instructor."*
- 13) *"A process that students go through themselves throughout their studies where they show an interest in language learning with teacher stimulating them or even without having a teacher."*
- 14) *"Understanding the purpose of one's learning program; accepting responsibility for their learning, sharing in the setting of learning goals, taking initiatives in planning and executing learning activities and reviewing their learning."*
- 15) *"Probably having control over learning a language, the purpose why you learn that language."*
- 16) *"An ability which can be taught; when student take initiative to do something different in terms of learning without being forced or imposed on to do it."*
- 17) *"Students' ability to understand how language is functioning. The initiative to develop the four skills. Being able to learn outside the classroom."*
- 18) *"A concept in which the learner has learned or has the ability to progress in the language learning process individually without being dependent on a teacher."*
- 19) *"Students taking initiative to do activities (writing, speaking, reading, etc.) in class outside of the syllabus. Also, at home they might choose particular ways to exercise what they did in class or even what they did not. It is something that enables students exercise their language learning capacities."*
- 20) *"Independent language learning meaning that the student is able to individually control his own learning."*
- 21) *"The ability to learn autonomously."*
- 22) *"The intrinsic motivation of the student to learn a language."*
- 23) *"The capacity of being able to ask the teacher to do something else besides what's in the syllabus."*
- 24) *"When the learners are involved in designing the syllabus, course objectives, selecting materials, teaching methods and when they are able to learn themselves outside the classroom as well."*

- 25) *"The skill and ability to perform duties and learning on their own with their own initiative."*
- 26) *"Guiding learners and helping them to become self-sufficient language learners. Learners who are aware of their language learning goals and who can apply strategies in order to achieve these goals. For the learners it should also include taking responsibility for their own learning and development."*
- 27) *"When minimal or no rigorous restrictive frames of what and how to learn are given by the instructor; only loose, but constructive suggestions are provided."*

Language learning autonomy is not

- 1) *"Learning only because you have to".*
- 2) *"Lecturing , memorizing, transferring knowledge from teacher to student, learning facts, reciting".*
- 3) *"Something that can be directly taught. It is a combination of teacher's influence and students' capacity";*
- 4) *"Following instructor's advice all the time".*
- 5) *"Relying on textbooks only, assuming that the teacher is responsible for learners' progress and development"*
- 6) *"Something that you can teach in one lesson, it needs the learners interest and will."*
- 7) *"Anarchy in learning".*
- 8) *"Forcing students to learn a target language by using inadequate materials that don't suit their needs, interests as well as their level of proficiency."*
- 9) *"Doing only what the teacher or syllabus tells you to do."*
- 10) *"An ability which is taught or imposed on."*
- 11) *"Leaving the learning entirely up to the students and have them make decisions they are not ready/ capable to make."*
- 12) *"A skill that can be learnt and developed unless addressed properly and if students' awareness is raised."*
- 13) *"To learn things the way they are not or to distort language grammar forms and use abbreviations at any time for any situation."*
- 14) *"A lack of reflective engagement with one's learning as well as lack of proactive commitment."*
- 15) *"Learning by yourself."*
- 16) *"Memorizing, lecturing, learning facts."*
- 17) *"Listening to lectures and taking notes only."*

- 18) *"Teacher centered teaching where the teacher makes all the decisions for the syllabus and materials and what is to be learned outside the class. The students have very little initiative in the language learning process."*
- 19) *"Spending time at the local tea shop and playing cards. Unfortunately, this is what our students do."*
- 20) *"Something that can be easily acquired."*
- 21) *"Determining the objectives and the goals of the course."*
- 22) *"Grudging participation in classes which the student is not interested in."*
- 23) *"The learners to decide what they always want to learn; it has to be related to the syllabus in a way. It has to be decided with the teacher, so it is a combination of what learners want and what the teacher wants."*
- 24) *"When the teacher decides everything for them and they depend on the teacher in order the learning to take place."*
- 25) *"Learning on their own".*
- 26) *"Imposing tasks and activities on learners without taking into consideration their own needs and objectives, learning styles and preferences. On the other hand, it does not mean that the learners should be left entirely on their own to do whatever they want without having any clear language learning goal and without knowing any steps how to achieve these goals."*
- 27) *"When a student repeats mechanically, reproduces."*

2. It is the teacher's (T), the learners' (L) or both the teacher and learners' (B) responsibility to:

	T	L	B
a) make sure learners make progress during lessons	40%	3%	57%
b) make sure learners make progress outside class	10%	50%	40%
c) stimulate learners' interest in learning English	73%		27%
d) identify weaknesses in English	47%		53%
e) make learners work harder	63%	7%	30%
f) determine the objectives of the English course	47%		53%
g) decide what should be learnt next	54%	3%	43%
h) choose what activities to use in class	60%		40%
i) decide how long to spend on each activity	67%		33%
j) choose what materials to use to learn English	50%		50%
k) evaluate progress made	50%		50%
l) decide what is to be learnt outside of class	3%	30%	67%

3. The concept of language learning autonomy is another 'western' idea imposed to cultures, like ours, where it is not applicable.	Yes	No
	30%	70%

4. Language learning autonomy is	an inborn capacity	an ability which can be developed
	17%	83%

5. Fostering language learner autonomy is a worthwhile goal	Yes	No
	87%	13%

6. In my classes / lectures students _____ take initiative (i.e. openly express interest in doing something different than what is determined in the syllabus).	Always	sometimes	rarely	never
	3%	61%	33%	3%

7. (Based on your understanding of autonomy) How would you rank the students you had this semester:	Highly capable of being autonomous	Somewhat capable of being autonomous 77%	Not capable of being autonomous at all 23%
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8. Years of teaching experience	2	3	4	6	7	8	9	10	13	15	19
	3%	7%	7%	20%	10%	17%	13%	3%	3%	3%	3%

Fostering Students' Autonomy through Task-based Learning in Developing Students' Speaking Skills in Academic Settings in the EFL Classroom

Abstract

The results of the final oral exam have shown that the Language Centre's low-level proficiency students face difficulties in expressing themselves and even producing simple sentences. The reason for gaining low scores might be because students have not developed speaking skills, as they do not use the language outside the class and in real-life situations.

To begin with, it is important to mention the big discrepancy that students face when they come from high school to South East European University. Students are accustomed to more teacher-centred classes. Language classes usually proceed with lectures and no opportunities to use the language in a meaningful way. Usually language classes are focused on grammar forms, translations, and memorization. Students perceive language as a subject to be learned, instead of a tool to be used for interaction.

A good solution to the above mentioned situation would be that English language teachers expose students to real life language task exercises. As students do not have the opportunity to use English outside the classroom, task-based activities offer them an alternative to practice the language. During their task activities, they are encouraged to go through the process of critical thinking, problem-solving, working in teams and using the language communicatively. Nunan (2004) advocates that task-based learning encourages student-centred learning, helps learners develop language skills and supports learning autonomy.

Many high school teachers consider the learner autonomy as an activity that students do outside the classroom. Recent studies show

that the role of the teacher needs to change from someone who is in control of learning and makes learning happen, into a facilitator and a guide in the learning process that is controlled by the learners (Voller 1997: 101). At the university level, it is important to foster the students' autonomy and assist them in taking control of the language learning process.

This paper assesses students' autonomy through task-based learning in developing students' speaking skills in academic settings. It reveals the effects of the implementation of a task-based approach. This paper examines if task-based learning can help students become more autonomous and encourage them participate in activities and gain more competence in speaking.

Keywords: Students' autonomy, speaking skills, critical thinking, methodology.

I. Introduction

Students that enter our university come from different educational backgrounds and they have no knowledge of how to learn and achieve by themselves. They are used to depending on the teacher and the course book. They hardly ever take initiative and are unwilling to participate in different tasks and activities, especially in communication. Therefore, English teachers should contribute in fostering learner autonomy for the great impact that it creates in the learning process. Scholars have defined the autonomous learners as students who are able to develop strategies, assess their own work and take initiative. They reflect on their failures and successes and in that way are able to learn *how* to learn.

Among many scholars, Holec (1981) defines learner autonomy as "the ability to take charge of one's own learning", which he then specifies as "to have, and to hold, the responsibility for all the decisions concerning all aspects of this learning." Also, Boud (1995) characterizes an autonomous learner as one who is prepared to take some significant responsibility for his own learning.

Most of the research in the field of autonomy is based on the three hypotheses: the nature of autonomy and its components, the

possibility of fostering autonomy among learners, and the effectiveness of some approaches to fostering autonomy in terms of language learning, (Benson, 2001). The objective of this paper is to explore and analyze the effectiveness of the task-based learning approach on development of the students' speaking skills in academic settings. The paper assesses students' autonomy through task-based learning, and in developing students' speaking skills. It reveals the effects of the implementation of a task-based approach and examines if task-based learning can help students become more autonomous by participating in task activities.

II. Literature review

Task-based learning is an optional approach to language teaching where a task based activities engage students to 'real-world' contexts, using the four skills: reading, listening, speaking and writing. While all of these skills are important, reading is mostly important because students do not practice reading outside the frame of the curricula. Reading is one of the strategies to be used for expanding their vocabulary. As Carrell and Carson (1997) defined, reading for pleasure has two characteristics: reading a large number of reading materials, and focusing on the meaning rather on the language. The last one was of a great interest to the language teachers of SEEU us in helping students use language. Usually, due to time constraints, reading is not used as a valuable source of input.

On the other hand, textbook activities do not offer students opportunities to reflect on their abilities, to do research and to assess themselves. There is a general assumption that language is acquired through communication (Howatt, 1984). Task-based language learning assists learners in discovering the language system when they communicate. Task-based learning focuses on learning about how language works in discourse as an input to new language production; the language input is language data, spoken and written texts, rather than language models presented as targeted structures. (Lap, 2005)

Before we start analyzing scholars' work and talk about the advantages and disadvantages of using this approach, we should first define the terms 'task' and 'exercise'. These two terms are generally

very confusing; therefore many students and teachers do not understand the purpose and benefits of this approach. "A task is an activity where the target language is used by the learner for a communicative purpose (goal) in order to achieve an outcome" (Willis, 1996).

On the other hand, Ellis gives a more precise definition and separates tasks from exercises. "*Tasks* are activities that call for primarily meaning-focused language use. In contrast, *exercises* are activities that call for primarily form-focused language use." (Ellis, 2003).

Teachers should also be able to distinguish between these two concepts. They should be careful when practicing a new structure, e.g. doing a drill or enacting a dialogue or asking and answering questions using the 'new' patterns. These types of activities are not considered as tasks, because their primary goal is to revise the teaching material.

Prabhu stands as the most appreciated person in the development of task-based teaching literature. His main achievement has been raising awareness towards this approach. Prabhu (1987) defines a task as "an activity which required learners to arrive at an outcome from given information through some process of thought, and which allowed teachers to control and regulate that process" (p 24).

The definition of the task has been broken down as follows:

- meaning is primary
- there is a problem to solve
- the performance is outcome-evaluated
- there is a real-world relationship.

The well-known scholar Willis (1996) identifies eight purposes of the task-based language teaching, which he ordered as follows:

1. To give learners confidence in trying out whatever language they know;
2. To give learners experience of spontaneous interaction;
3. To give learners the chance to benefit from noticing how others express similar meanings;
4. To give learners chances for negotiating turns to speak;
5. To engage learners in using language purposefully and cooperatively;
6. To make learners participate in a complete interaction,

7. To give learners chances to try out communication strategies; and
8. To develop learners' confidence that they can achieve communicative goals.

Many teachers have accomplished the task-based approach in their teaching and the results were positive. I will briefly discuss some of the researchers who have employed their methods, and presented their results.

Lopez (2004) has conducted task-based instructions as an alternative of presentation-practice-production (PPP) approach for teaching English in two classes in a private school in the south of Brazil. He found out that students that used task-based instructions (TBI) learned English more effectively because they were using the language to accomplish the task, to find the information, solve problems, and to talk about personal experience.

Pica-Porter, Paninos and Linnel (1996) explored the effect of interaction during the accomplishment of a task. The participants of this study were sixteen English-speaking intermediate students of French as a foreign language at the University of Hawaii. The findings of this study showed that the language produced by participants during the simulation was typical of negotiation for meaning. The results also indicated that the interaction between second language (L2) students offers data of considerable quality, but may not provide the necessary input that would result in reconstruction of the learners' language. The study concluded that L2 students can be a source of modified and limited input, and the interaction between them is not as rich as the interaction between native speakers and non-native speakers.

Al Nashash (2006) investigated the effect of a task-based program for teaching English language productive skills on the development of first year secondary grade female students' oral and written skills at a secondary school in Amman. The results showed that task-based language teaching (TBLT) through the designed program based on the procedures and principles of task-based language teaching TBLT improved the learning of communicative speaking and writing skills somewhat better than the conventional method of teaching.

In order to accomplish a successful class, teachers should be aware of the components of the task-based teaching framework. It consists of three main phrases (Willis 1996: 38):

1. *Pre-task*: prepares learners to perform tasks in ways that promote acquisition. At this stage, the teacher introduces the topic and task in front of the class. Together they explore the topic, the teacher highlights useful words and phrases, helps the students understand task instructions, and prepares them for the next step.

2. *Task cycle*: offers learners the chance to use whatever language they already know in order to carry out the task, and then to improve their language under the teacher's guidance while planning their reports on the task. Students do the task in pairs or small groups while the teachers' role is to monitor.

There are three components of a task cycle:

a. *Task*: Learners use whatever language they can master, working all together in pairs or small groups to achieve the goals of the task.

b. *Planning*: Learners plan their reports effectively. They report to the whole class (orally or in writing) how they did the task, and what they decided or discovered.

c. *Report*: In this stage, learners tell the class about their findings. Students receive feedback on their level of success on completing the task.

3. *Post-task stage*: provides an opportunity for students to reflect on their task and encourages attention to form, in particular to problematic forms, which demonstrate when learners have accomplished the task.

On the other hand, before implementing this approach, teachers should also be familiar with the types of task to be offered to the students. Willis (1996) has categorised six types of tasks:

Listening: brainstorming, fact-finding

Ordering and Sorting: sequencing, ranking, categorizing, classifying

Comparing: matching, finding similarities and differences

Problem Solving: analysing real or hypothetical situations

Sharing Personal Experiences: narrating, describing, exploring and explaining opinions and reactions

Creative Tasks: brainstorming, fact-finding, ordering and sorting, comparing, problem solving, etc.

All of the aforementioned tasks enable learners to take control over learning and use the strategies to cope with the language outside the classroom. Incorporating these activities throughout the teaching and learning would be the first step toward learner autonomy.

III. Significance of This Paper

This paper revealed the students' perception on the integration of task-based teaching, particularly in speaking activities, and gives insight to which EFL teachers might refer. It investigated students' attitudes towards this approach and gave a picture of how it affected autonomous learning. It also examined teachers' attitudes towards the usage of task-based activities. The study results can be useful for all teachers of languages at SEEU because this institution has a tendency to use contemporary teaching methods towards language teaching and learning in order to help students become independent learners and make classes more student centred.

The biggest advantage of using the task-based approach in English classes is that students can use different resources as input. This also eases the teachers' work, as they can be very open and creative when teaching. They depend on the limited course book materials, but they can use different sources as well. Some of the input might be: articles from newspapers, books, brochures, short stories, poems, lyrics, songs, radio, DVD's, TV scripts, shopping lists, postcards, pictures, maps, etc.

As seen from the previously stated examples, teachers and students are free to use whatever material they think would suit their level, interest and creativity.

After deciding on the appropriate input, the next important step would be the processes of using and adopting the input according to the students' needs. At this point, Nunan (2004) emphasizes that procedures specify what learners actually do with the input.

According to the criteria for task selection, the criterion supports the active participation rather than rehearsal.

IV. Participants

The participants in this study are sixty SEEU undergraduate students, between the ages of 18-25, male and female, all in the multicultural classroom setting. Their level of proficiency is elementary and pre-intermediate. They are from different faculties and take English classes as mandatory courses.

V. Methods

Study data was collected through student and teacher questionnaires and investigate their attitudes toward task-based teaching and learning. The questionnaires are designed in the form of a 5-point Likert scale ranging from "Strongly Disagree" to "Strongly Agree" with values 1-5 assigned to each alternative. The questionnaires were distributed to four English teachers and to sixty students.

The study was conducted on a sample of two groups: an experimental group taught by the task-based program (TBP), and a control group taught conventionally. The discussion of the findings is presented according to the research questions of the study.

For the purposes of this paper, the following instruments were used: A pre-test of speaking skills and post-test to measure the effect of the task-based approach on the students' oral interaction. The first data (pre-test) scores were collected from students' first introduction class. Everyone was given three minutes to introduce themselves to their classmates. At this point, I took a note on a speaking rubric for each student. The post-test results were collected after students were exposed to the task-based teaching, again based on the same grading, speaking rubric. This time the experimental group was given a topic to be discussed in the group. Students, in group of four, discussed the tasks assigned to them, for example: greetings, ordering food in a café, describing and finding places in town, compiling qualities of a good friend, finding the differences between two pictures or texts, solving a problem, etc. The test covered the scope of accuracy and fluency. A rubric for assessing the students' oral interaction was used

to assess the students' performance before and after implementing the task-based approach.

The study attempts to answer these questions:

- What is the teachers' perception towards the implementation of Task-based teaching in developing the students' speaking skills?
- What is the students' perception on the task-based activities in the classroom?
- Can task-based learning foster learners' autonomy in academic settings?

VI. Interpretation of Findings / Results

- Q1: What is the teachers' perception towards the implementation of Task-based teaching in developing the students' speaking skills?

According to the teachers' questionnaire results, the overall impression of the Language Centre (LC) teachers is that TBL has a positive effect on students' learning process. Teachers claim they believe that using authentic material engaged students in the meaningful interactions in the classroom. Teachers say that TBL can improve the interactions among students in class, it enhances learners' communicative competency and provides students with more opportunities to use English. Although teachers shared positive feedback toward the TBL, they had some concerns regarding this approach. One of the concerns was that TBL requires a high level of creativity and it is time-consuming for the teacher to find the appropriate materials. As TBL is student-centered, it requires individual and group responsibility and good classroom management. Teachers were also concerned that, as students are allowed to use whatever language they know, there might be a risk for learners to achieve fluency at the price of accuracy.

- Q2: What is the students' perception on the task-based activities in the classroom?

Students' general impression was that task-based learning provides a relaxed atmosphere to promote target language use. Students' answers to the questionnaire revealed that they felt more motivated by the task which connects to real-life situations than the activities in the book. They enjoyed the work group activities. Task-based teaching offered the opportunity for 'natural' learning inside the classroom. Students were very happy to be able to use whatever vocabulary and grammar they know, rather than just the task language of the lesson. Students claim that using task-activities is a good way to improve English vocabulary and gives them more chances to practice English. The task-based learning assisted learners enjoy learning English.

Q3: Can task-based learning foster learners' autonomy in academic settings?

In task-based learning, the tasks are central to the learning activity. The questionnaires prove that students can learn more effectively when their attention is focused on the task. The main reason for gaining better results is that they are focused more on the language they use than on the grammatical form. The classroom atmosphere is comfortable, cooperative and there is a lot of interaction among students. The final oral exam results demonstrated that students scored better results and interaction than previously. In addition, we should also emphasize the fact that the different task types stimulated different interaction patterns. As a result, some task types might be more appropriate than others for learners at particular levels of proficiency. As tasks are goal-oriented, they are the crucial reason that moves the student to engage in a task. While completing task-based activities, students acquire new words. Learning new vocabulary helps students become more fluent because the more words they know, the easier it is to express themselves. Acquiring new vocabulary make students feel that they are learning new things and not relying only on previous knowledge.

VII. Conclusion

The results of the research questions revealed that task-based teaching offers variety for the students. A task-based lesson usually provides the learner with an active role in participating and creating the activities, and consequently increases their motivation for learning. A task-based lesson offers more opportunities for the students to display their thinking through their actions because the use of the target language is essential. The aim is therefore to propose activities where the learners are engaged in authentic language use among themselves. In many course books, activities deal with the reproduction of language. An example is the traditional question-and-answer activities where learners are asked to answer questions in a text. In most cases, the answers can be found even without understanding the text or the question. By contrast, learners could be asked to formulate their own questions or discussion points in connection with a text. Since students conceive English as a subject to be learnt rather than a language for communication, this leads to a lack of interaction. Integrating language and content makes the use of English more 'real', interesting and meaningful, by offering a variation to the language-driven approach, as well as by giving the pupils the opportunity to use English as a tool to investigate and describe (Bowler, 2006). It moreover enables social, cognitive, psychological and emotional development by involving high thinking skills (ability to make hypotheses, predictions and observations). It improves their learning since it encourages students in completing task activities, which leads to development regarding their performance. Students' impressions toward this approach were positive, as they do not support teacher-centered lessons where students cannot find enough opportunities to express themselves in the target language. The findings presented in this paper are a classroom experience. In the above study, it was found that with elementary to pre-intermediate learners, the relatively closed tasks stimulate more modified interaction than relatively more open tasks. The task-based teaching enables learners to acquire new linguistic knowledge and to develop their existing knowledge. TBL is

motivating students but also promotes a student-centered approach, which is one of the principles of language teaching. Students were more eager to learn, and often excited, in contrast to following book activities only. The approach is especially very beneficial in mixed ability classrooms, as it supports cooperative learning, where students working together can help each other. Task-based learning enables students to be actively engaged with language in an authentic context and challenges them to build meanings and patterns, which help them, develop into autonomous learners.

VIII. Limitations

Task-based activities caused students to become noisy, usually speaking in their mother tongue, meaning that students sometimes produced less of the target language.

The time constraint for implementation of this approach was too short; implementing this method over more periods of time may yield different findings. The study was limited to a relatively low number of students. It should also be used to assess other language levels, such as EAP, ESP etc. As a recommendation for the teachers study indicates that the learners are willing to be more active and take control over their learning. Teachers should promote autonomous learning by helping *them* acquire skills and knowledge to implement during their learning. It is sometimes we as teachers and the educational system that have discouraged learners from becoming autonomous by not giving them sufficient opportunities to explore and become acquainted with their skills and abilities.

The strength of the task-based approach to language learning is that it focuses the student toward accomplishing an objective where language becomes a tool and using the target language becomes a necessity.

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Appendix I: Questionnaire on teachers' perceptions

Questionnaire on teachers' perceptions of Task-based Language Learning

Strongly disagree	1	←	→	5	Strongly agree
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1. I am familiar with the theories of TBL.
1 2 3 4 5
2. I am familiar with the practice and methodologies of TBL.
1 2 3 4 5
3. I believe that tasks should have a primary focus on meaning.
1 2 3 4 5
4. TBL should make use of authentic material
1 2 3 4 5
5. The use of authentic materials enhances students' interest/
motivation for Learning
1 2 3 4 5
6. Team work is essential to the successful implementation of TBL.
1 2 3 4 5
7. I favor a mixture of TBL approach with other teaching approaches.
1 2 3 4 5
8. TBL provides students with more opportunities to use English.
1 2 3 4 5
9. TBL can increase learners' motivation to learn.
1 2 3 4 5
10. TBL can transform the learning process to be more meaningful.
1 2 3 4 5
11. TBL can improve learners' communicative competency.
1 2 3 4 5
12. TBL can enhance learners' fluency in English.
1 2 3 4 5
13. TBL can improve learners' accuracy in English.
1 2 3 4 5
14. TBL can enhance the interactions among students in class.
1 2 3 4 5
15. TBL can increase the opportunities for learners to use
English for communication.
1 2 3 4 5

16. TBL pursues the development of integrated skills in the classroom.

1 2 3 4 5

17. A task has a clearly defined outcome.

1 2 3 4 5

Adapted from: <http://hub.hku.hk/bitstream/>

Appendix II: Questionnaire on students' perceptions

Strongly disagree	1	←	→	5	strongly agree
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1. Task-based learning helps learners enjoy learning English.

1 2 3 4 5

2. I believe that I can learn English faster when I use it more often. 1

2 3 4 5

3. Task activities give me more chances to practice English. 1

2 3 4 5

4. I am more motivated by the task which connects to real life situation than the activities in the book?

1 2 3 4 5

5. A task involves a primary focus on meaning.

1 2 3 4 5

6. Task -based learning advanced my critical thinking.

1 2 3 4 5

7. Using tasks activities is a good way to improve English vocabulary.

1 2 3 4 5

8. I enjoy group work.

1 2 3 4 5

9. Task activities enhance students' autonomy.

1 2 3 4 5

10. task-based learning activates learners' needs and interests.

1 2 3 4 5

11. I improved my speaking skills using task-based activities.

1 2 3 4 5

12. task-based learning provides a relaxed atmosphere.

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to promote target language use.

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Language transfer in the written English of Albanian ESP students

Abstract

An incentive of interest to using a mother tongue in the English classroom is predetermined by the need to improve language accuracy, fluency and clarity. This study examined language transfer while learning and teaching English for Specific Purposes, respectively the language interference in the written English of Albanian students. The study focused on recognizing, describing and explaining transfer-induced lexical and syntactic patterns that occur in essays written by Albanian University level students, and on following a possible change in the quantity and quality of these transfer patterns.

The analysis of these transfer patterns aims at explaining the written English production by Albanian students, namely, how it is influenced by their mother tongue and what types of changes have taken place in it. The activities that help raise learners' awareness of the language use are described. The findings reveal that all learners need a support of mother tongue in English classes, but the amount of the native language needed depends on students' proficiency in English. The role that mother language plays in second/foreign language acquisition in general and particularly its role in teaching English for Specific Purposes (ESP). Using first language (L1) as a necessary and facilitating role in the second /foreign language (L2) classroom, as well as in ESP classes has been a very hotly debated issue among teachers of English. This report will investigate the role of L1 (Albanian) in understanding and comprehending lessons of ESP and texts combined from different contents and compare students' and teachers' perceptions regarding the use of L1 in ESP classes in the monolingual classroom.

Keywords: ESP, Law, University, mother tongue, Albanian

1. Literature Review

The development of the field of study 'English for Specific Purposes' (ESP) was as a result of the acknowledgment of the importance of the purpose and needs of language learners. There are many peculiarities found within the English language that have led to a growing interest from researchers who strive to make it possible to distinguish English for Tourism, English for Law and Business English among others. Linguists have observed that since languages are constantly subjected to change due to its flaccid state, one cannot exclusively claim that they speak perfect English or any other language as of that (Choroleeva K, 2012). Even a native speaker cannot be considered to perfectly know his/her mother tongue. The foreign language of choice for most Albanian students is English. The students do not solely want to understand how a language functions or merely know how it compares stylistically with other learned languages. The learners are interested in learning the functions of the language because it is an aspect of professional and social acceptance and it also is a self-actualization aspect. However, even after investing ample time and effort in learning a foreign language, it has been noted that students usually have inhibitions when it comes to expressing themselves in the foreign language. They still use their native language when speaking or writing. This can be blamed on the methodology that most students use when acquiring a foreign language. Instead of learning for oral communication, they learn to gain reading proficiency in a foreign language or for the sake of being scholarly (Dralo A, 2012).

1.1 The Role of Language Transfer in Second Language Acquisition

Language transfer affects speakers or writers either positively or negatively depending on the relevant unit structure of both their native and acquired languages. Most learners apply knowledge from their native language to the second language and this transfer can result in both positive and negative transfer. Positive transfer occurs

when the meaning of items that are transferred is in line with the native speakers' notion of acceptability. Negative transfer occurs when the opposite happens resulting in errors. Negative transfer happens at a greater scale when the difference between two languages is big. The similarities and dissimilarities in word meanings and word forms affect how quickly a learner can acquire a foreign language (Odlin T, 1989: 77).

The method used in teaching foreign languages in most educational institutions is Grammar Translation. The major characteristics of Grammar Translations are:

The target language is taught in mother tongue and there is little active use of the language

Most of the vocabulary is taught in the form of isolated lists of words Learners are given long elaborate explanations of the complexities of grammar

Difficult texts are learnt to be read early

The exercise given to students is mostly that of translating disconnected sentences from the target language into mother tongue and vice-versa.

Little to no attention is given to how words should be pronounced (Dralo A, 2012).

The importance of language transfer in learning a second language has over the last few decades been reevaluated severally.

The foundation of ESP is not a familiar subject-matter concepts and lexis. For learners to succeed, they need to be proficient in reading and writing. Arguments, on how much one's mother tongue affects his/her acquisition of a new language, have risen and a divide has been created between groups that are for monolingualism in the classroom and those that are against it. Butzkamm (2003.5) as cited in Suntharesan V's research paper 'Role of Mother Tongue in Teaching English to Tamil Students' remarked, " The international dominance of English native speakers who find absolution in the dogma of monolingualism when they cannot understand the language of their pupils, together with the cheaper mass production of strictly English-speaking in the Anglo-American mother country, constitutes one of the reasons behind the sanctification of, and the

demand for, monolingualism in the classroom.” Here, Butzkamm supports the use of first language in the classroom as it is a useful tool which can be used to explain difficult grammar. L1 can also be used when giving instructions which learners might not be able to understand in English, and for checking understanding, especially when using complex contexts (Suntharesan V, 2012).

The use of the first language provides students with a sense of security that enables them to learn with ease and in comfort. Mother tongue serves social and cognitive functions in that students who work in groups will discuss in their native language. This allows them to relate and have a sense of identity. Language transfer or translation is an involuntary thing done by language learners. Using L1 in cases where students are incapable of activating vocabulary proves useful in their learning, and gives them the comfort to read difficult texts in the second language. With texts that require higher proficiency, learners are advised to first read the text in their first language, then in the second language to better understand the concept (Suntharesan V, 2012).

The influence of a learner’s native language in making the acquisition of a second language easy or difficult varies depending on factors that will be analyzed in this study. Many learners need a sense of security when learning a foreign language. It is challenging for them to completely abandon their native tongue despite the communicative methods that emphasize that a foreign language (FL) be taught, and learnt through the foreign language. The idea of ceasing the usage of mother tongue in the language classroom was brought by the odd phenomenon where after studying a foreign language (FL) for a long time through grammar-translation; students were still unable to fluently speak in the language. In the 1970s and 1980s, challenges to assumptions about the importance of transfer arose. This was due to claims made by Fries (1952) and Lado (1957) about the existence of cross-linguistic differences. The two stated that the differences in cross-linguistic differences in the acquisition of second language could be defined by contrastive analysis (Torrijos R, 2009).

Two different versions of the contrastive analysis hypothesis (C.A) have since risen: C.A. a priori and C.A a posteriori. The former is also known as the predictive or strong version while the latter is known as the weak or explanatory version. C.A a priori is the point to point analysis of syntactic, phonological, morphological and other subsystems of both languages learnt. This hypothesis suggests that with the similarities between both languages, a student will easily acquire a foreign language but with the differences, acquiring it will be harder. C.A a posteriori concentrates more on error analysis. Most errors occur due to the strategies that students use to acquire a foreign language thus linguists and teachers should pay more attention to what learners actually do than concentrating on their assumptions of what the student will do (Torrijos R, 2009).

Most semantic errors made by learners occur due to overgeneralization of the target language, strategies of learning the second language, language transfer, transfer of training and strategies of second language communication.

Translation is important at the intermediate and advanced level, and is also referred to as the fifth language skill alongside listening, speaking, reading and writing which are the four basic skills. Translation from L1 to L2 and L2 to L1 gives room for understanding between strangers and is an important social skill. Teachers of foreign languages are aware of the importance of translation in language classrooms since all students, whether good or bad at comprehending reading or listening materials, mentally translate the material from L2 to L1 and the other way around (Odlin T, 1989. It is difficult for students to directly think in the foreign language while writing since translation from FL to L1 in their minds is inevitable. Learners of a second language rely on the structure of their native language to produce utterances in the target language, and this can either be helpful or contrary. Their use of mother tongue tends to influence their learning of a foreign language both positively and negatively.

The influence of a student's native language, on how easy or difficult acquiring a foreign language is, all lies in the process through which learners of the foreign language go through while

learning. Some learners may acquire native-like proficiency in more than one foreign language learnt, while others fail to achieve the same proficiency in a foreign language as they do in their native language. Learners acquire a second language by using the knowledge they already have of their native language. They use general learning strategies and universal properties of language. These universal properties enable them to internalize the second language. The student is able to construct a transitional system that reflects to his/her current knowledge (interlanguage) of the foreign language. Students also acquire a foreign language through using existing knowledge that enables them to cope with communication difficulties.

Students draw on their background experiences and prior knowledge of their native language to acquire a second language. They use structures from their first language that are similar to the second language and experiment with this new language. An interlanguage, which consists of the learner's existing knowledge of the second language, is thus created. The learner is in the end able to overcome communication breakdowns by using what they already know (Garza). However, it has also been viewed that as much as mother tongue can support a learner's use of a foreign language's vocabulary, it can also fail to support or hinder their ability especially when trying to construct complex words and expressions.

Languages differ in not only the forms used for meanings, but also in the meanings themselves. For example, the alleged computer translation of "the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak" into Russian and back is "the vodka is all right, but the meat is bad," (Swan M, 2008). This shows that different languages have different meanings for certain words. A word in a certain language may have several equivalents in another language. However, a relative exact fit in meanings can be found in words relating to concepts that are steadfastly grounded in physical reality. Japanese speakers have different lexicon for talking about dressing unlike English speakers who use only one lexicon 'put on for' dressing. In English, the verb 'put on' is used for all clothing from headgear to shoes while in

Japanese, different verbs are used for upper body garments, lower body garments and even shoes (Clark, 1993).

One of the objectives of this study are to find answers to the following basic research questions and to examine answers in the context of theories which describe the relationship between ESP and mother tongue:

- 1) What is the relationship between L1 and English for Specific Purposes (ESP)?
- 2) How much is L1 (L1) used in ESP classes?
- 3) Is L1 helping students mastering ESP lessons?
- 4) What are students' perceptions when using L1 in ESP classes?

One of the aims was to verify whether using students L1 in acquiring a second language has a facilitating role. Showing also if it helps students feel more relaxed and comfortable when acquiring a foreign or second language. English for Specific Purposes are specialized courses. It is different from general English courses since its focus is mainly the content based learning. The syllabi of these courses is mainly divided and organized in a thematic order. Therefore, Dudley-Evans (1998) defined the use of ESP as follows:

1. ESP is defined to meet specific needs of the learners
2. ESP makes use of underlying methodology and activities of the discipline it serves
3. ESP is centered on the language appropriate to these activities in terms of grammar, lexis, register, study skills, discourse and genre.

Using or not using the mother tongue in second or foreign language acquisition deals mainly with the teaching methodology. In classes where teachers use L1 are referred to as using the traditional method or the grammar translation method, whereas classes where teachers do not use L1 are referred to those that use the direct method as a teaching methodology.

2. Research Methodology

The employed methods included administering self-assessment questionnaires and interviewing learners and teachers at the respective faculties. Also, students were given translation activities through writing.

2.1 Participants

The research included 200 participants in this research: second-year students and fourth year students from different faculties: Business Administration, Law, CST and PA. In general, from each faculty three classrooms were chosen to participate in the project randomly.

3. Results

A high percentage of 75 of the student participants in this study felt that L1 should be used in their English classes. Teachers in the other hand shared their views, more than half were against using L1 in their English classes. Approximately 7 percent of the students responded that they like their teachers to use only English in the classroom. Very obvious is the 82 percent of students who would like L1 used to explain difficult concepts, but also about 65 percent of teachers considered this as a right use. Generally, students also responded notably higher than teachers on the following uses for L1: to help students feel more comfortable and confident, to check comprehension, and to define new vocabulary items.

A notable percentage of students would like L1 to be used in English classes either between 10 and 30 percent of the time. A large number of students like the use of L1 because it helps them feel more comfortable and they feel less lost. About 67 percent of students feel L1 can be used in translating the unknown words and difficult words.

These results showed that in English classes L1 should be used in EFL/ESL and ESP classes to some degree. A majority also agree that the use of L1 helps them to learn English more easily.

Teacher responses

In this study, I also asked teachers to respond to the question "If you use L1 in your classroom, why do you think this may be more effective than using English exclusively?"

Here are some of their responses:

- Some difficult concepts really need to be translated in students' mother tongue in order to help them follow up the activities.
 - L1 Enables students to understand new professional concepts that are first created first in English and as such they need exclusive explanation in L1.
 - Using of L1 definitely helps the learner, since they become more capable of understanding the concepts and learn better all language skills.
 - Sometimes it might be helpful to clarify very difficult concepts or vocabulary which is unfamiliar to students and the teachers cannot elicit their meaning from students, or when they cannot guess their meaning from the context.
 - Sometimes students need translation into their native language in order to understand better concepts that seem difficult for them.
 - Students might feel less nervous in learning the difficult concepts in English language.
 - In some cases, L1 helps to check understanding of very complex expressions, like idioms, phrases, etc. Therefore, I use L1 to clarify or check understanding in very complex language expressions.
 - I believe that using L1 in L1 classes helps lower level student when new vocabulary is introduced or when we teach them comparative grammar.
 - Students understand better L2 if they base it upon L1.

4. Conclusions and implications for the teaching

First, all the learners customarily rely on their mother tongue in learning English. Second, the amount of the native language that students need depends on their proficiency and linguistic situations. Third, the statistical processing of the research findings showed that the data are significant in spite of the small sample of recipients. Finally, the students' autonomously generated reading comprehension exercises, summary writing and back-translation activities help raise learners' awareness of differences between English and the

mother tongue and facilitate linguistic development. Also, teachers have to take into consideration the teaching environment and the target population they teach. Some of them would say that in such classes using L2 as much as you can is very crucial, since students are only exposed to L2 only in classes; therefore they need more exposure to L2, because they do not practice their L2 outside classrooms. Others would also say that if you only use L2, you make your students try to communicate with you in that language, giving them the opportunity to practice the target language and drag out as much output in L2 as possible.

Additionally, I agree that English should be the primary means of communication in L2 classroom and that you should give students ample opportunities to process English receptively as well as to give them the opportunity to practice the target language and drag out as much output in L2 as possible even outside classrooms. Moreover, if we are interested in creating a student centered classroom seriously, then my findings have important implications on what we do in our classes. My research also proves that a second language can be learned through comparison of similarities and differences between the L1 and the L2. Moreover, bringing L1 into the English classes has made learning English appear to be less of tense and less lost students but students being more comfortable. This way, students will be more courageous and willing to learn English since their preferences are taken into consideration and are valued properly.

It is now commonly acknowledged that language transfer, or cross-linguistic influence, does occur, but is a far more complex phenomenon than hitherto thought (Benson 2002:68). Transfer can be positive and facilitative, where the two languages are identical, or negative, when there are foremost differences between two languages. Transfer may occur at all levels: phonology, syntax, lexis, and pragmatics.

Raising learners' awareness can be valuable: teachers can clearly point out differences between L1 and L2. For this purpose translation may be helpful, because it can be interactive, learner-centered,

promotes learners' autonomy, and uses authentic materials (Mahmoud, 2006:30). With the English learners, we have used a number of activities that are useful for their linguistic development. Post reading activities give students the chance to review, summarize, and react to a reading material through discussions in small or large groups. After having read a text as a homework assignment, students were encouraged to generate various comprehension exercises, such as multiple choice questions, true or false statements, general questions on the contents of the text. Learners' designed exercises were scrutinized in pairs or small groups. The activities of writing different types of summaries, e.g. restatement, descriptive summary or opinion essays, have also proved beneficial by allowing teachers to pin-point errors stemming from the mother tongue. However, checking written work increases teacher's load significantly and might be considered as a disadvantage. The most beneficial activity has been back-translation class activity. Selected texts for re-translation should not be too long or too linguistically complex, nor too distant from the knowledge of the student. Students in pairs translated different short passages from L2 into L1. Then pairs exchanged their translations, and different pairs translated the peers' passages back into L2. Finally the double translations L2 → L1 → L2 were examined and compared with the original texts. The ultimate analysis of re-translated texts by students and teacher's feedback allow to raise learners' awareness of vocabulary, grammar, style, and language transfer. Suggestions for further studies would include a further examination of the effect of mother tongue in acquiring a second or foreign language acquisition. Another possible aspect to examine would be the use of translation in ESP classes while teaching vocabulary, since students are prepared for the domestic labor market, and they need to know words in English and in Albanian in order to compete in the regional and domestic markets. It would be also necessary to examine if there is a relationship between words that have an equivalent in Albanian and English and words that do not have an equivalent, i.e. which words are learnt and memorized more easily.

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CALL in Teaching English at the University of Banja Luka

Abstract

In recent years, computer-assisted language learning has advanced significantly with the development of new technologies and methods, providing many tools for a learner to acquire more knowledge autonomously. The Sanako computer phonological laboratory, in combination with other applications such as Moodle and Adobe Connect, is an example which provides students of foreign language departments with assets to use in developing their language skills and being more engaged in literature classes, both in the classroom and for individual work. The laboratory can be particularly useful as a tool for improving pronunciation, practicing interpretation and providing students with individual access to multimedia content for literature classes, which allows them to experience literature works at their own pace. The paper further shows how students responded to such laboratory work, and what challenges have arisen for both the students and the teachers. The paper raises questions of how different it is and (why) is it better than the traditional approach, how sustainable it is, what technical issues may arise, and how well teachers who are not technically proficient respond to new technologies, showing that the benefits greatly outweigh the drawbacks.

Keywords: computer-assisted language learning, phonological laboratory, language skills, literature classes, sustainability

1. Introduction

Since the notion of CALL was introduced in the 60s and 70s, there have been varying views about the exact method and manner of its application. Warschauer (Computer-assisted language learning: An introduction, 1996) now famously divided CALL into behaviorist, communicative and integrative, with other similar or different divisions, approaches and theories coming up since then due to the ever increasing influence and power of the web.

A general conclusion from the early days is that CALL as a tool should be seen as a supplement, not a replacement of the traditional or existing methods of work; that the computer is not meant to replace the teacher, but to be a tool in the teacher's hand. In recent years, computer-assisted language learning has advanced significantly with the development of new technologies and methods.

Today there are many pieces of software designed to be used by the language learner on their own, but many more which are intended for use within a classroom context, during class or post-class activities, within the institution or at the learner's home. Chun and Plass believe "the use of a networked environment for learning in general and for second language acquisition in particular is of great importance because that is different from the traditional design of text-based and stand-alone systems." (as cited in Shafaei, 2012, p.110).

The Faculty of Philology is the youngest faculty at the University of Banja Luka, founded in 2009, but the foreign language departments previously existed as part of the Faculty of Philosophy since 1993. In 2010 the English language and literature department joined a TEMPUS program called "*South East European Project for the Advancement of Language Studies*". Within that program, in 2013 we obtained a Sanako language laboratory with 14 student licenses and one teacher license. For such a young faculty and university, this laboratory, in combination with applications such as Moodle and Adobe Connect, is very significant in our efforts to keep up with modern trends in EFL.

This paper presents how we tried to utilize this digital laboratory in our classes and some ways it can be utilized in others, with an overview of some of the outcomes of our efforts, in terms of benefits and challenges we encountered.

2. Recently obtained software

We will focus our attention to three specific tools of CALL which are relatively new to our department, and which we have attempted to utilize in our teaching process, bringing about more autonomous learning processes for the students. The particular uses and benefits of the newly available features will be laid out in more detail in sections 3 and 4.

2.1 Sanako Study 1200

As a PC version of a language laboratory, the Sanako Study 1200 provides many teaching and learning activities, most notably Listening Comprehension, Model Imitation, Reading Practice, Round table discussion, Discussion and others (Sanako Corporation, 2013).

One of the most useful features for our work is that it allows for recording sessions of students' speech, which is of great use, primarily in improving their reading and speaking skills and teaching them phonetics and phonology, but also in other subjects such as interpretation exercises.

Also, the discussion features, where targeted groups can be formed and assigned different tasks, can be employed in courses of literature, cultural studies etc. Individual students can have private discussions with the teacher without disrupting the class.

Edwards (2009, p. 87) draws on several authors to conclude that "educational technology permits students to control the learning process and to address areas of personal need and interest, rising levels of motivation and promoting learner autonomy."

2.2 Moodle

Moodle is an online platform for distance learning, being developed since 2002 by an Australian-based company called Moodle Pty Ltd. Their official website (Moodle.org, 2013) defines it as "an

Open Source Course Management System (CMS), also known as a Learning Management System (LMS) or a Virtual Learning Environment (VLE)."

It further lists "ways to use Moodle:"

Moodle has features that allow it to scale to very large deployments and hundreds of thousands of students, yet it can also be used for a primary school or an education hobbyist.

[Some] institutions use it as their platform to conduct fully online courses, while some use it simply to augment face-to-face courses (known as blended learning).

[Some users] use the activity modules (such as forums, databases and wikis) to build richly collaborative communities of learning around their subject matter (in the social constructionist tradition), while others prefer to use Moodle as a way to deliver content to students [...] and assess learning using assignments or quizzes. (2013)

It is meant to be combined with traditional modes of teaching, creating hybrid environments and facilitating the work of the teacher with features such as electronic diaries, computer-handled grading, targeted glossaries etc., although the initial set-up of course pages requires a great deal of work.

A practical feature of Moodle is the ability to have the students submit papers via the class portal through their individual accounts for the page, with or without a fixed deadline or format. There is even a paper grading feature, although still limited and in early stages of development.

At first it may seem complicated and unintuitive, lacking a visual appeal in keeping with modern web design trends, but the functionality is relatively quickly revealed once one starts using it more frequently and there is an increasing availability of plenty of skins and themes to make it more attractive.

2.3 Adobe Connect

According to the company's website (Adobe Systems Incorporated, 2013), Adobe® Connect™ "is a web conferencing platform for web meetings, eLearning, and webinars."

Specifically for eLearning, it “provides a complete solution for rapid training and mobile learning, enabling rapid deployment of training accessible from anywhere, anytime, on virtually any device.”

As any virtual conference tool, it allows you to hold a lecture to a class where practically no two people need to be in the same room. What that means for a department such as ours is firstly that it provides a way of having classes from guest lecturers from any part of the world, or foreign “exchange” students in your own classes, without the enormous costs of their travel and accommodation arrangements.

Secondly, it allows you to make recordings of your entire class sessions, which you can then post on Moodle, thus enabling students who missed the class to catch up more easily, but also giving all students a chance to individually revise when studying.

It has many more built-in features and tools, such as the possibility to have any participant of the class speak to the class via the host-presenter system, or to use a virtual interactive white board etc.

During our work with the laboratory so far we have not had enough chance to take full advantage of Adobe Connect, however our department is developing a collaborative program with our partner universities from TEMPUS, where this program’s full potential can be exploited, since, as Edwards concludes, “internet-based communication technology can enable intercultural exchange, increase motivation, and provide students with access to authentic language in meaningful contexts” (Edwards, 2009, p. 88).

2.3 Language Lab at the Faculty

A part of the teaching staff, including the two of us, received training for the use of the Sanako software, Moodle and Adobe Connect. In the past semesters we tried to make use of the laboratory in our classes, the syllabi for which had to be adapted to these new tools, since, as Benson argues, “from the teachers’ perspective, [learner] autonomy is primarily concerned with institutional and classroom learning arrangements within established curricula” (2008, p. 15). The following sections will present our experience on both

the benefits and deficiencies of the software and its usage in the classroom.

3. Interpretation

Among other subjects we have worked on the subjects of Contemporary English Language, the primary purpose of which is to build and develop the students' language skills, in part developing their language production, vocabulary and comprehension through translation exercises. These exercises have another aim, to give the students some training in translation, especially in junior and senior year, as skills for a possible future career as translators/interpreters.

Having this in mind, we dedicated some classes of translation exercises to interpretation practice and exercises. The laboratory has proven very useful for these classes, because it supplements the trusted methods that are already in use having made possible new exercises which were unfeasible before. In particular, our students can now for the first time try themselves at oral interpretation, more specifically at simultaneous interpretation, where the students can work individually, playing material assigned by the teacher and listening to it at their own pace, interpreting it without interfering with each other as the headphones isolate surrounding sounds.

From the main station, the teacher has the option to record output from the student work stations while they are interpreting and collect the recordings to the main station for further use. The teacher is able to analyze the material at a later time, or play any of the recordings to the class for student peer-evaluation.

The assigned and recorded material can later be posted to a dedicated Moodle-based website, where the students can be engaged in a collaborative way, making up for missed classes, posting their home-made sessions for teacher- or peer-evaluation etc. Given the time, the teacher can analyze the students' recordings to identify their individual weak points and possibly organize future classes to work on some of those shortcomings.

4.Literature

For literature subjects, the advantage of Moodle is in creating a page for the class, where all the course materials (excerpts, audio-books, links to websites, other audio and video material) can be posted to be accessible to all the students at any time. The same could be achieved with a blog or other kind of website, but that would require additional costs for developing and maintaining the blog.

Moodle on the other hand uses an existing platform with a more formal environment, a purpose-built layout and an existing database of students with individual accounts, where teachers can easily add, modify or remove specific courses.

Another important feature that Moodle introduces to the literature class is the possibility of supplementing the in-class discussion with an online forum, where students can at any time after the class contribute new or elaborated opinions or add other relevant material or assignments for the other class participants, in line with Nunan's sixth and seventh step to learner autonomy – "Encourage learner choice" and "Allow learners to generate their own tasks" (Nunan, 2003, pp. 200-201). The teacher serves as a contributing moderator, monitoring and guiding the course of the discussion if needed.

Further, Sanako allows for an innovative approach to group work. The students can be divided into virtual groups, where each group can be assigned different discussion tasks and shown different audio and video materials, and afterwards asked to present the results of their discussion to the rest of the class.

1.1 Phonetics and Phonology

One of the primary uses of the Sanako software is for speaking and listening practice, and improving pronunciation.

For example, it allows the teacher to easily set up model imitation exercises, where the model can be the teacher himself, but also any audio recording, including that of a student from the class, along the lines of Nunan's eighth step to learner autonomy, "[encouraging] learners to become teachers" (Nunan, 2003, p. 202).

The students can record their sessions and play them back to check their performance.

More advanced phonology classes can make use of the audio graph mode, where students can analyze the visual representation and characteristics of individual sounds in order to better understand and emulate them.

Also, when doing model imitation, they can compare their recordings to the originals by inserting them side by side into a master track / file, which is also a very useful tool for improving pronunciation.

4.2 Other Activities

These new tools open up a whole new unexplored world of uses and practices that can be employed in the various subjects and activities. In listening comprehension exercises, students can be assigned audio material to use for e.g. dictation practice or gap fill exercises, and the students are able to go through the material in their own individual pace, while still being monitored and guided by the teacher. Similarly to previously mentioned exercises, the material and any recordings can be taken home for further practice.

For any subject, be it grammar, methodology or cultural studies, the ability to randomly or purposefully alternate students in groups with ease and no commotion, with the option to monitor any or all students at any given time, allows for more dynamic workflow and more involvement on part of the students.

1.3 Experienced benefits and challenges

Having used these new tools for the past two semesters, particularly Sanako and Moodle, we have discovered many benefits.

The students' responses were predominantly positive. As a novelty and an innovation to the classroom, the language lab is fun and interesting for the students, which favors the learning process making them more motivated and engaged. The technical proficiency of the new generations of students is an obvious upside as using computers is much easier and more natural for them and some of the features are similar to what they use on a daily basis outside

the classroom. Sanako's private discussions, for example, are very much similar to chatting on instant messengers.

Another important benefit is the development of a compatible learning style, where each student is given more opportunity to learn at their own pace and timetable.

Further, the ability to create targeted and changeable groups allows the teacher to engage less prominent students with self- and peer-evaluation, and spend less time on organizing the groups and their tasks. The tasks themselves can now be different for each group even if they involve playing different multimedia content.

Monitoring and guidance is much easier as the teacher can monitor several groups or individuals at the same time, contact an individual or group without disrupting others at work, or control the students' computer access to specific programs, websites etc.

A further benefit is that the class is extended into the students' homes, providing them with access to class materials, organizing discussions, posting contributions etc. The class web page can have a virtual notice board and other information or quizzes, increasing student participation through encouraging competitiveness.

Using Moodle can make students more responsible in regards to their duties. For example, setting a fixed deadline for submitting papers through Moodle eliminates the possibility for students who fail to complete the paper on time to count on the benevolence of the teacher to accept the paper after the deadline. With more development, grading might be almost entirely done by the computer, making the grade more objective and less objectionable.

And finally, what we consider to be the most important benefit of using these new tools are the changes in interaction patterns. Teachers strive to engage the students during class as much as possible, to minimize the T-S interaction pattern, and now we can have much more of S-T, S-S and S-Ss interaction, through model imitation, group discussion and analysis, peer evaluation etc.

There are, however, certain drawbacks. At times some students were confused by instructions for certain tasks, and haven't warmed up to some features yet, such as forum discussion and contribution after classes.

A huge impediment are the sizes of the groups we teach, ranging from 25 to 30 students per group. Having in mind that there are only 14 student work stations and that the classroom is shared with the faculty's other foreign language departments, students then have to be divided into even smaller groups, giving them only half the time planned for their classes.

Further, more often than not a problem arises with the equipment, be it issues with the sound, file transfer, hardware malfunctions etc. and it is up to the teacher to attempt to overcome these issues.

Another drawback is that there are still some students and many more teachers who are not computer-savvy, and there are many students who do not own computers or have internet access at home, which makes it more difficult for them to participate in activities outside the classroom.

Some of these issues can be resolved by more careful class planning, particularly in terms of time management, but most of them in fact depend on matters that are out of our hands or require time for improving our technical know-how with more extensive staff training.

5. Conclusion

This paper has presented the benefits of using the Sanako language lab software, Moodle and Adobe Connect which have been found in the short time that we have had the opportunity to use them, focusing on the benefits for the students' individual work and learning process. We believe this to be only a small part of what is surely a mountain of useful tools and techniques with a vast diversity of exercises, activities and practices that can greatly enhance both the teaching and learning experience.

What we benefit most from introducing these new tools into our teaching process are the changes of interaction patterns in the classroom from the T-S towards the S-S pattern and motivated individual work, along with new opportunities and prospects for the future.

One feature that will be available to us in the near future, using Adobe Connect among other things, is organizing distance learning,

where we could apply exemplary models from more developed partner universities in Europe.

Further, as the characteristics of smartphones and tablets are improving and as they are becoming more and more widespread, they will provide students with easier access to Moodle and all the class materials will become available at all time, enabling students to extend the learning process from the classroom environment to the time and place of their own liking and convenience.

And finally, these tools have allowed for simultaneous interpretation exercises, which were previously impracticable at the Faculty of Philology in Banja Luka, and which are invaluable to our students as their future job-related skills and competences, available for the students to evaluate, analyze and expand in the comfort of their homes. Ultimately, new subjects, courses and summer-schools on interpretation could be introduced, perhaps leading to forming a sub-department for translation and interpretation, leading to many more ways to improve and amplify the learning process, either through class activities, guided or self-regulated individual work on part of the students.

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Teaching with technology: Exercises fostering learner autonomy in EFL classes

Abstract

Nowadays, higher education institutions are concerned more with learner autonomy. The teachers are highly encouraged to promote learner autonomy in the classroom and outside. Teaching with technology is considered to be one of the most prosperous ways to promote autonomy by using the appropriate exercises which foster learner autonomy in the English as a foreign language (EFL) class.

The purpose of this study was to investigate learner's attitudes on using technology in the language classes, with the aim of creating and fostering the autonomy of the learners. This paper discusses the importance of autonomy and autonomous learners, and it goes on by analysing the role of technology in assisting and fostering learner autonomy at University level.

The results show that technology enhances learner autonomy, empowers students and encourages them to become autonomous. However, the key issue is choosing the appropriate materials. In that case, autonomy undoubtedly takes place. It turned out that the autonomous learners did much better in a course compared to the students who were not as autonomous as they were.

Keywords: autonomy, learners, autonomous learner, technology, teaching

I. Introduction

Teachers of English as a second language (ESL) or English as a foreign language (EFL) face different difficulties and challenges in their everyday teaching. These difficulties and challenges are due to students' different backgrounds, different cultures, needs, expectations or learning styles, and the challenges they face are due to the

fact that teachers aim to have successful classes, draw and keep the attention of all the students in the classroom, make the classes interesting and appealing to them, and to make the students participate actively in the language classes. But it is not only limited to this; teachers aim to make students autonomous learners, and they try to do this by using a variety of methods, techniques and approaches.

They offer the students the support they need, the resources available, they tend to be there as facilitators and to help the students, but yet the students are in charge of their own learning. This can be achieved by a variety of activities, one of which is the incorporation of technology in the language classes. At a university level, it is not only necessary but almost a requirement to foster autonomous learning by the incorporation of technology in the language classes, in order to attract students' attention and make them interested in the classes.

We assume that the teachers know their students, and therefore they know the capacity and potential of their students, which means the teacher will set goals which are in accordance with the learners' capacities and potentials. Thus, the activities chosen by the teacher will be appropriate for the learners' levels but yet challenging. The purpose of this study is to analyse the advantages of incorporating technology in the language classroom. With technology, both the teacher and the students can focus on all language skills (such as reading, writing, listening, and speaking); the learners can also have grammar and vocabulary exercises, videos, songs, blogs, forums, and many other things which can lead to their successful achievement of the set goals.

II. Literature Review

In the modern era, the change from traditional teaching has shifted towards modern teaching methods, techniques and approaches. But, as is known, it doesn't end with that. With the introduction of autonomy in teaching in the mid 1970's, making learners autonomous learners has been ongoing.

Benson (2001) as cited in Benson (2007:21) talks about the beginnings of autonomy in language teaching and learning, and how

important it became shortly after that. He says that:

I reviewed the literature on autonomy in language teaching and learning from its origins in the mid-1970s up to the end of the 20th century. Since the turn of the century, however, interest in autonomy has grown considerably. ...In terms of sheer quantity, the literature on autonomy published since 2000 exceeds the literature published over the previous 25 years.

So, since autonomy has been given the importance it deserves, one of the major challenges teachers face today in their English as a foreign language (EFL) classes is how to make their students autonomous learners, who are capable of managing their own learning and who are capable of continuing as autonomous learners even outside the classroom, which they perceive as a safe place. In order to help students become autonomous learners the teachers have to know the students' needs, and they need to know how their students learn, i.e. students' learning styles, and all of these can be combined by the use of technology in the classroom.

Different scholars like Dickinson (1978), Little (1991), Benson and Voller (1997) have defined autonomy. Henry Holec gave a famous definition of autonomy, and which has been referred to many times. Holec (1981:3) in his book *Autonomy and Language Learning* defines autonomy as the "ability to take charge of one's own learning". This ability "is not inborn but must be acquired either by 'natural' means or (as most often happens) by formal learning, i.e. in a systematic, deliberate way". He points out that "To take charge of one's learning is to have [...] the responsibility for all the decisions concerning all aspects of this learning [...]" Furthermore, the term autonomy has been defined by Dickinson (1978:11), when he claims that "Autonomy is a situation in which the learner is totally responsible for all the decisions concerned with his [or her] learning and the implementation of those decisions."

Here, as Holec did, Dickinson implies that the learner is the one who makes all the decisions for his/ her learning. By this, it is clear that it depends on the learner and no one else can be held

responsible for the results, and is responsible for his/ her learning. The saying of Galileo Galilei (1564-1642) relates to these definitions since he said that: "You cannot teach a man anything; you can only help him find it within himself." Consequently, Benson and Voller (1997:29) have a definition of autonomy that says "Autonomy is a recognition of the rights of learners within educational systems". Correspondingly, Icy Lee (1998: 282), states that "learner autonomy involves taking responsibility for the objectives of learning, self-monitoring, self-assessing and taking an active role in learning".

Subsequently, Little (1991:4) defines autonomy as "... a capacity — for detachment, critical reflection, decision-making, and independent action. It presupposes, but also entails, that the learner will develop a particular kind of psychological relation to the process and content of learning. The capacity for learner autonomy will be displayed both in the way the learner learns and in the way he or she transfers what has been learned to wider contexts." The importance of technology on learner autonomy is discussed by Warschauer et al (1996:1), who say that:

Proponents of computer learning networks claim that they are an excellent tool for fostering new social relations in the classroom, resulting in greater student empowerment. In student empowerment the teacher plays a limited role in the student learning which relieves the teacher from the many roles that he has traditionally played in the learning process.

Sheerin (1997:58) claims that "At the lowest level of independence a learner might be willing and able to work unsupervised but in every other respect be dependent on a teacher or advisor for direction. With the advent of the Internet, networks in classrooms or labs have played an increasingly important role in language education and provide new opportunities for autonomous learning." Although the incorporation of computers offers opportunities for the students to become autonomous, the role of the teacher is undoubtedly the most important one, as it is the teacher who chooses the appropriate materials and who offers support.

III. Significance of the study

This paper investigated how students perceive the incorporation of computer technology, and of online exercises to assist them in becoming autonomous learners, in the classroom. It also investigated students' attitudes towards these and drew conclusions about how much students benefited from the incorporation of technology in creating autonomous learners. The study results can be useful for teachers of English as a second or a foreign language. (ESL or EFL).

IV. Methodology

This study was carried out at South East European University, Tetovo, the Republic of Macedonia, in the academic year 2013/2014.

We applied two types of data collection. We administered a questionnaire and a quiz for the students. We decided on these two types of data collection because they are more appropriate for the nature of our study and therefore will lead to more significant and reliable results.

The study answered the following research questions:

1. What is the role of technology in enhancing autonomous learning?
2. What is the importance of choosing appropriate exercises which foster learner autonomy?
3. Are autonomous learners more successful in a course?

IV.1 Participants

This study involved 50 participants, all students at South East European University, in their second and third year of studies. The students are aged 18-30 years old, and they are all non-native speakers of English (e.g. Albanian, Macedonian, Turkish, etc.)

IV.2 Procedure

Two groups of Basic Skill English students participated in this study. With one group only the book was used, with extra activities for vocabulary and grammar exercise, and for writing. With the other group, we used technology in almost all classes (except for in-class writing, in-class reading, or quizzes). All grammar and

vocabulary lesson were presented by using technology, and even for the essay writing we used the computers. After several weeks, we administered the questionnaires for both groups of students, and we administered a quiz for them, to see which of the groups did better and was more successful.

V. Results

The questions from the questionnaire have been analysed and have led to the following results.

The following table contains all the questions and the number of students who responded for each question.

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
I was able to do the activities by myself	62	12	14	8	4
I was not depending on the teacher as much as I do in regular classes	76	12	12		
I felt I learned more like this	54	26	10	10	
I was much more successful in the classes with technology	42	30	14	16	
I felt more self confident	72	20	6	2	
I felt I could chose what activities to do	78	16	6		
I enjoyed classes much more	88	4	8		
I felt autonomous	72	16	8		4
So far I have accumulated more percentage of the overall course than before	96		4		
All the activities were relevant and helped me a lot	92	8			

1st Research Question: What is the role of technology in enhancing autonomous learning?

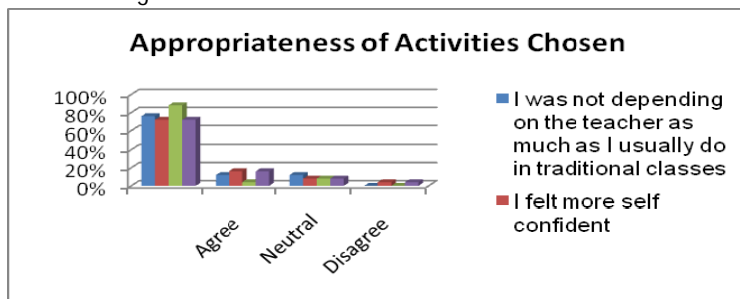
Technology was shown to be a very useful tool in assisting learners to become autonomous learners. By using technology in the classroom, the students were able to control their learning, and they made decisions on which activities to continue, and to receive

immediate feedback from the computer. They felt relaxed, and enjoyed working with computers.

According to the questionnaire results, as far as statement 1 is concerned 'I was able to do the activities by myself' (62% strongly agreed, 12% agreed, 14% were neutral, 8% disagreed and 4% strongly disagreed). More than 50% of the students were able to do the activities themselves. Statement 2 'I was not depending on the teacher as much as I usually do in traditional classes' showed that 76% of the students strongly agreed with this, whereas 12 % agreed and 12% were neutral, and none of the students disagreed or strongly disagreed with this. Statement 5 is also related to this research question—it says 'I felt more self confident,' bearing in mind that the survey was for the students with which we used technology in the course; 72% of the students strongly agreed with this statement, 16% agreed, 8% were neutral, and 4% disagreed. The third survey statement related to this research question is statement 7, which is the following: 'I enjoyed these classes much more.' For this statement, 88% of the students strongly agreed, 4 % agreed, and only 8 % were neutral. The last statement is also interrelated with this research question, 'I felt autonomous'; 72 % of the students strongly agreed, 16% agreed, 8% were neutral, and 4% of the students strongly disagreed.

According to these data it turns out that the role technology plays in assisting autonomous learning is huge, since most of the students enjoyed the classes. They felt independent, did not depend on the teacher much, and felt more self-confident, which is very important. They felt autonomous, which was the main aim of using technology. By this, it is confirmed that technology assists learners in becoming autonomous learners.

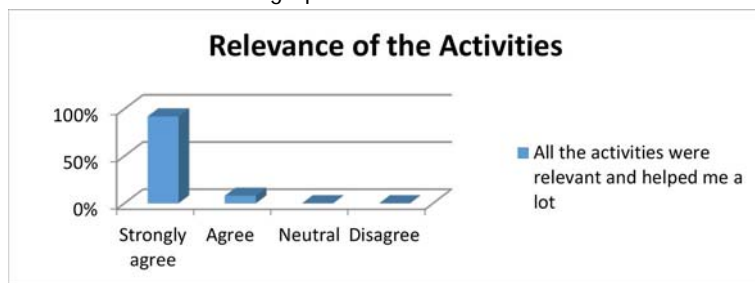
The following is a chart of the mentioned statements.



2nd research question: What is the importance of choosing appropriate exercises which foster learner autonomy?

The survey results showed that students found the materials appropriate. The materials/ exercises/ activities were carefully chosen by the teacher beforehand. Then the students had the opportunity to choose some of the exercises on their own. Statement 3 'I felt I learned more like this' (54% strongly agreed, 26% agreed, 10% were neutral and 10% disagreed), shows that with the appropriate choice of materials students feel when they are learning, so that they themselves can come to the conclusion when they learn and when the tasks are too difficult and not appropriate. Statement 10 'All the activities were relevant and helped me a lot' shows that the materials are very important for assisting and fostering autonomous learning. (92% of the students strongly agreed and 8% agreed). If the exercises were too easy or too difficult, the aims and the objectives would not have been met. If the exercises were too easy the students would not be as interested. And if the exercises were too difficult, the students would need the teacher to help them during the whole class, and thus the role of the teacher would not be only that of a facilitator and guide.

This is shown with the graph:



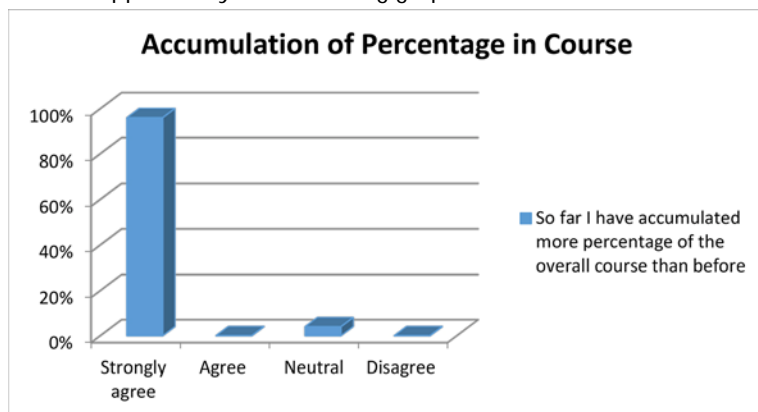
3rd research question: Are autonomous learners more successful in a course?

The survey results showed that students were much more satisfied with the results they had achieved in language classes where the computer was used. In the conference they had with the teacher at which they were informed about their performance, they saw that they had achieved much better results compared to other language

classes previously. This was also supported by the results of the group of students where only the book and extra activities were used. Statement 4 'I was much more successful in the classes with technology' produced these results: 42% strongly agreed, 30% agreed, 14% were neutral and 16% disagreed. The biggest number of the students--72%-- strongly agreed and agreed that they were more successful in these classes, thus leading to the fact that autonomous learners are more successful in a course. Statement 5 ('I felt more self-confident') showed that 72% strongly agreed, 20% agreed, 6% were neutral and 2% disagreed. Finally statement 9, which states 'So far I have accumulated more percentage of the overall course than before,' proves what has been said above (96% strongly agreed and only 4 % were neutral).

The analysis of the learners' answers for the above-mentioned statements show that when learners are given the opportunity to become autonomous they are more successful in a course, more self confident, and gather more points during their continuous assessment. This proves that autonomous learners are more self confident and thus are much more likely to do better in a course.

This is supported by the following graph:



VI. Conclusions

This study dealt with the effects of technology in promoting autonomous learning. We had two groups of students, and with one of the groups we used the usual way of teaching, using the book and some extra activities and exercises. With the other group we used the computer technology when we presented grammar and vocabulary lessons as well as writing and sometimes reading.

According to the results it turned out that technology assists learners in becoming autonomous, with the right choice of exercises, activities and tasks. The teacher is there to help learners, but he is there only as a guide or a facilitator. These kinds of classes are student-centred, and students are likely to participate more willingly in the lesson and learn as much as they can.

In conclusion, it turned out that this method is very effective in fostering learner autonomy, and at the same time this method helps learners learn the material in an autonomous environment which enables them make decisions related to their learning.

VII. Limitations and Recommendations for further research

The limitations of the study are as follows:

There was a small number of students included in this study, and there was not enough time to carry out an analysis elaborated in more depth. ESP (English for Specific purposes) students could be involved in a future study.

The recommendations for further research are the following:

Another study could be carried out with a larger scale of students, with more time at our disposal so that the results are more reliable.

ESP students could be involved in a future study and see how this method applies to them.

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APPENDIX 1

TEACHING WITH TECHNOLOGY: EXERCISES FOSTERING LEARNER

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
I was able to do the activities by myself	62	12	14	8	4
I was not depending on the teacher as much as I do in regular classes	76	12	12		
I felt I learned more like this	54	26	10	10	
I was much more successful in the classes with technology	42	30	14	16	
I felt more self confident	72	20	6	2	
I felt I could chose what activities to do	78	16	6		
I enjoyed classes much more	88	4	8		
I felt autonomous	72	16	8		4
So far I have accumulated more percentage of the overall course than before	96		4		
All the activities were relevant and helped me a lot	92	8			

APPENDIX 2

QUIZ

Quiz 2-Level 2

Vocabulary:

I. Complete the sentences with the correct preposition: with, after, forward, of, from, for.

1. Last night I dreamed _____ being alone on a desert island.
2. I'm looking _____ my grandchildren next week while my daughter is on holiday.
3. I'm looking _____ to the weekend.
4. I waited _____ the bus for half an hour.
5. I often argue _____ my dad about politics.

II. Write the opposite verb phrases.

Push the door Pull the door.

1. Lose a match _____.
2. Remember to pay _____.
3. Buy a car _____.
4. Learn Spanish _____.
5. Get a letter _____.

5

points/ _____

III. Complete the sentences:

That's a very nice jacket.

1. Levi's are famous for their j_____.
2. Business people usually have to wear a s_____ to work.
3. I always t_____ on clothes before I buy them.
4. Take o_____ your coat. It`s very hot in here.
5. I wear my t_____ when I do sport.

IV. Write the opposite adjective:

Big Small

1. rude _____

2. noisy _____
3. possible _____
4. dangerous _____
5. patient _____

5 points/_____

V. Grammar:

1. My house is (big)_____ than yours.
2. This flower is (beautiful)_____ than that one.
3. This is the (interesting)_____ I have ever read.
4. Non-smokers usually live (long)_____ than smokers.
5. Which is the (dangerous)_____ in the world?

VI. Present continuous tense or present simple tense:

6. Look! John (jump)_____ into the water.
7. I (have)_____ lunch in the cafeteria every day.
8. I (go)_____ to New York next Saturday. Do you want to come with me?
9. Don't give her any cheese. She (hate)_____ it.
10. You will not find Sarah at home now. She (study) _____ in the library.

10 points/_____

Total 20

points/_____

The role of intentional vocabulary teaching practices in enhancing autonomous learning in acquiring vocabulary

Abstract

Learner autonomy has become essential for English language learners at university level. The language classes are organized in such ways by the teachers that the learners have the space and freedom to become autonomous.

When it comes to vocabulary teaching and learning, teachers assist the learners by using different methods to achieve learner autonomy. They use different exercises and techniques to promote learner autonomy and to motivate the learners during the classes and outside as well. The role of the intentional vocabulary teaching practice in enhancing autonomous learning of the target vocabulary was investigated in this study. The purpose of this study was to investigate the effects of the intentional vocabulary teaching strategy on creating and assisting autonomous learning and of course, the acquisition of the vocabulary presented in class.

The results showed that the intentional vocabulary teaching strategy turned out to be very effective in assisting and enhancing learner autonomy. The usage of this strategy makes students feel empowered, and make some decisions related to their own learning. It also motivates learners in that they want to succeed in the course, want to learn more. Furthermore, this strategy assisted learners to acquire the target vocabulary easier.

Keywords: learner autonomy, vocabulary, teaching strategies, effectiveness

1. Introduction

Nowadays, teachers of English as a second language (ESL) or English as a foreign language (EFL) all around the world use different means to connect with other language teachers to share opinions, ideas and classroom experience. All of this is done, in order to make the best of the language classes. Working in a higher education institution, i.e. university it means one works with adults. Working with adults is very interesting, challenging, motivating, and at times fun. However, working with adults means much more preparation and putting much more effort into the lesson, to make it appealing to the students, interesting, understandable and make complex things simple.

Being a language teacher means teaching the four language skills such as reading writing, speaking and listening, as well as grammar and vocabulary. Vocabulary is a very important aspect of language, since the learners need the words in order to be able to express themselves in the target language. But teaching vocabulary is not as easy as one might think. The teachers prepare different materials, use different methods and techniques, and try different ways to teach the words, and make the students not only learn the words, but also remember them and use them, not only in the classroom but outside of the classroom as well. The two main vocabulary teaching strategies are the incidental and the direct vocabulary teaching practice. The first one, as already implied by its name, takes place incidentally, without the purpose of doing so, whereas the latter occurs as it is the aim of the teacher, and it is achieved by different activities organized by the instructor.

In order to make learners learn better, we need to help them become autonomous, since learner autonomy is very important in the teaching and learning process. This paper examines the role of the direct vocabulary teaching strategy in assisting autonomous learning.

2.Literature Review

Teachers use different methods, techniques, approaches, activities and exercises to teach their students vocabulary. In fact, it is not as easy as it sounds. Choosing the appropriate materials, exercises and activities is time consuming and requires a lot of thinking and preparation, especially if we want to achieve the goals and objectives set for that particular class. Furthermore, besides achieving the objectives, we want to assist our students in becoming autonomous learners using the direct vocabulary teaching strategy.

Decarrico, talks about the importance of vocabulary in language learning, and he claims that "Vocabulary learning is central to language acquisition whether it is a second, or a foreign language. Even in a learner's mother tongue, there is an incessant learning of new words and new meanings for old words." (Decarrico, 2001:285) Richards (1997:7) as cited in Zimmerman 1997:5 is of the same opinion as Decarrico, and claims that "Vocabulary is central to language and of critical importance to the typical language learner"

As already mentioned above in the introduction section, there are two main strategies of teaching vocabulary, and those are the direct and the incidental strategy. According to Schmitt (2000:116) the two main strategies of vocabulary acquisition are "explicit learning through the focused study of words and incidental learning through exposure when one's attention is focused on the use of language, rather than the learning itself"

The incidental strategy as it is already implied by the name itself means that the learning of the words is not the main aim of the activity, in this case mostly reading. Richards & Schmidt (2002) as cited in Ahmad (2011:67) claim that "Incidental learning is the process of learning something without the intention of doing so. It is also learning one thing while intending to learn another." Furthermore, the direct strategy means that the activities are done for a specific purpose, and the aim of the activities is for the students to learn and remember the vocabulary presented in class, as well as be able to use it, not only during the class but in their everyday communication, understandably, where applicable.

The direct vocabulary teaching strategy has to do with the grammar translation method and mainly takes place by the different activities and exercises prepared and organized by the teacher. This is best described with what Ahmad (2011:68) says "intentional vocabulary learning is based on synonyms, antonyms, word substitution, multiple choice, scrambled words and crossword puzzles, regardless of context, is not so effective, because learners are more prone to rote learning." Whereas the incidental vocabulary teaching strategy is related to the communicative approach and it mainly takes place by reading. Coady (2001) as cited in Ahmad (2011:67) supports this and says that "Incidental vocabulary learning motivates learners for extensive reading. It involves learners' ability to guess the meaning of new words from the contextual clues. Incidental learning occurs more particularly through extensive reading in input-rich environments, albeit at a rather slow rate."

However, studies have shown that the direct vocabulary teaching strategy is more effective. Holmes (1934) and Gray and Holmes (1938) as cited in Groff 1981:263 found that "the direct method is significantly more effective in this respect than are incidental procedures like independent reading."

Our aim is to assist autonomous learning through the direct vocabulary teaching strategy, but we must define the word autonomy first. Learner autonomy or autonomous learning has been widely discussed from different scholars who have given important contributions in defining what autonomous learning is.

Holec (1981) is perceived as the first scholar who has talked about autonomy in education, i.e. in teaching and learning. That is why we will start with his definition. Holec (1981:3) sees autonomy as "ability to take charge of one's own learning" He (Holec, 1981:3) goes on by stating that this ability "is not inborn but must be acquired either by 'natural' means or (as most often happens) by formal learning, i.e. in a systematic, deliberate way". He points out that "To take charge of one's learning is to have [...] the responsibility for all the decisions concerning all aspects of this learning [...]". However, there are other scholars who offer an insight of what vocabulary is. Along these lines Barr and Tagg (1995)

claim that autonomy occurs when the power is given from the teacher to the student. Whereas, Dickinson goes on by claiming something similar, he says that it is the learner who is responsible for all the decisions they make concerning their learning. "Autonomy is a situation in which the learner is totally responsible for all the decisions concerned with his [or her] learning and the implementation of those decisions" (Dickinson 1978:11)

It must be stressed out that autonomous learners or autonomous learning does by no way mean that the students are left alone, and that they are working alone, it is when they are communicating with each other, they actively participate in the lesson, and do their best to learn, in our case the vocabulary presented. Autonomy means that the students actively participate in their learning; they are not passive but actively engaged in their learning. It is Benson (2001) who argues that in autonomous learning, the learning is not performed on the learner, rather it is the learner who is an active participant in everything that takes place in the classroom during all times. The learners builds up knowledge from experience, he does not only follow the teachers instructions.

2.1 Significance of the study

The study examined how students perceive the direct vocabulary teaching strategy. It investigated student attitudes towards this strategy. The study also investigated the effects of this strategy on creating and assisting autonomous learning and of course, the acquisition of the vocabulary presented in class. The results of this study are useful to all teachers of English as second language (ESL) or a foreign language (EFL), because this study revealed how this strategy functions and what its implications are in vocabulary acquisition and assisting autonomous learning.

3. Methodology

Data was collected in Basic English Skills classes, at South East European University in the academic year 2013-2014. Data was analyzed using two types of data collection. We administered a

questionnaire for students and one for teachers, and we administered a quiz for the students.

This study answered the following research questions:

- Does the intentional vocabulary teaching strategy enhance learner autonomy in acquiring vocabulary;
- Does the intentional vocabulary teaching strategy motivate learners more in learning the target vocabulary;
- Does this strategy help learners acquire the target vocabulary easier?

3.1 Participants

60 students studying at South East European University, in different departments, participated in this study. The students are 18-30 years old, all non-native speakers of English, both male and female.

3.2 Procedure

The direct vocabulary teaching and learning strategy has been used with two Basic English Skills Intermediate groups. One of the groups was the control group and the other group was the treatment group. With the first group, the control group there was usual teaching taking place, with the other group, the second group we taught vocabulary using the direct vocabulary teaching strategies and practices. After 2 months of instruction, both groups were given a quiz to see how much of the vocabulary has been acquired, and questionnaires were administered to see whether the way of teaching affected the learner autonomy.

3.3 Results

As far as the first research question *'Does the intentional vocabulary teaching strategy enhance learner autonomy in acquiring vocabulary?'* is concerned, the treatment group questionnaire results showed that this vocabulary teaching strategy is effective in assisting and enhancing learner autonomy. Students' answers to the open ended questions proved that this strategy worked. To the question: *'Did the activities help you become an autonomous learner, how?'* 21 students out of 32 (65.6% of the students) replied that the activities helped them become autonomous. As far as 'how' is

concerned as a summary students mentioned that first of all they liked the activities, they worked in pairs and in groups, they shared ideas and opinions with their colleagues, they enjoyed the classes. They were not as dependent on the teacher as in traditional classes. I will cite what a student said "It makes me an autonomous learner because I like to do the activities on my own; I like it when the students talk more than the teacher, and we did this in this class. I learned a lot of new words and I can use them. I feel free to express myself and I do not depend on the teacher as much as before".

Another question that answers this research question is 'Are you able to do more activities independently outside the classroom?' 23 out of 32 students (71.8%) said that they do vocabulary activities at home. They like doing it because they get immediate feedback from the computer, and can use the word in different contexts. 'Were you able to interact with colleagues and did you enjoy the learning?' 68.7% of the students said that they were able to talk to discuss with their colleagues during the classes and that they enjoyed the classes. One student's answer is the following "I talked to my partner about the activities, we did the exercises together, he told me what I didn't know, and I told him what he didn't know. We didn't ask the teacher. I liked this much more than I like working alone. The classes were very interesting. " To the question 'Are you able to use some of the words in communication, 59% of the students said that they are able to use the words in everyday communication in the target language.

The second research question '**Does the intentional vocabulary teaching strategy motivate learners more in learning the target vocabulary**' was answered by the students' answers in the treatment group. The question 'Were you motivated to work harder and succeed in the course' was answered by all students, and according to the questionnaire 25 (78%) students were motivated to work harder, learn more and have a better grade in the course. One of the students said "When the teacher gives us activities like this, I want to learn more. The activities are fun, interesting and I like the class. I am very motivated to participate a lot in the class. I understand the words and want to use them." To the question "Did you feel

important in the classroom' 28 students (87.5%) said that they felt important. I will cite one of them, who said "I feel important in the English classes because attention is paid to me, the teacher listens to what I say. That makes me learn more. I think feeling important in the classroom is the key to success."

Finally, as far as the third research question is concerned 'Does **this strategy help learners acquire the target vocabulary easier?**' most of the students said that this strategy turned out to be successful, as 26 out of 32 students (81%) said yes. To the question 'Did the activities used help you remember new words easier?' Students were positive since most of them said that the strategy proved to be successful. 23 students (71.8%) said that the strategy was a success; they had learned the words and were able to use them in the classroom and outside as well. One of them students said "I liked this way of learning new words, it is easier for me to learn the words this way, and I can remember the words and use them".

The quiz results also support the above said, the treatment group quiz results showed that this strategy was effective in helping students acquire the vocabulary presented in the language classes. However, the control group quiz results are not as good. 20 out of 32 students (64%) in the treatment group answered all 20 questions correctly. 5 students (15%) answered 18 questions correctly, 4 students (12%) answered correctly 15 questions, 2 students (6%) answered correctly 13 questions, and 1 student (3%) answered correctly 11 questions. The same quiz was used for both groups.

In the control group there were 28 students, and the following are the quiz results of the noted group. 12 (42%) students answered correctly all 20 questions. 7 students (24%) answered correctly 17 questions, 3 students (10%) answered correctly 13 questions, 3 students (10%) answered correctly 11 questions, and 2 students (8%) answered 10 questions correctly, and 1 student (3%) answered correctly 9 questions, and only 1 student (3%) answered correctly 8 questions out of 20.

4. Conclusions

As it has already been mentioned in one of the previous sections of this paper, vocabulary is a very important aspect of any language, and especially of the language learners strive to acquire. This is so, because people need words in order to be able to get the message across, to communicate in the target language. In this study the effects of the direct/intentional vocabulary teaching strategy were elaborated and it turned out that this strategy is quite successful and works well for the learners and the teacher. But, this was not the only purpose of this study, we also analysed the effects of this strategy in assisting autonomous learning and assisting learners to become more autonomous, and thus, succeed and learn more. This was proved by the questionnaire results and the quiz results of both groups. The students feel motivated, they are involved in their teaching, and they enjoy such classes, they want to learn more and succeed in the course. This is all part of autonomous learning. To sum up, this study gave an insight of the importance and role of the intentional vocabulary teaching strategy and its effects on vocabulary acquisition and assisting autonomous learning.

5. Limitations and Recommendations for further Research

The Limitations of this study are:

There was only a small sample of students; only 60 students were involved in the study. This may not be applicable to other groups of students, as for instance ESP (English for Specific Purposes) students. There were time constraints: had we had more time, we would have carried out a more in-depth study of the subject matter. If we had had more participants and more time the results would have been more reliable.

The recommendations withdrawn from this study are as follows:

A bigger sample of students should be involved in the study. More time is needed in order to carry out a more in depth analysis of the issue.

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Learner Autonomy: From Theory to Practice

Abstract

Learner autonomy as a concept started to gain attention from the late 1960s as a result of the developments in educational psychology i.e. with the cognitive revolution in learning that led to the establishment of the ways in which young learners acquire academic skills and come to know how to learn intentionally. In language learning, it seems that the broadest and the most commonly spread understanding of learner autonomy refers to taking responsibility of one's own learning and progress. This paper reviews the developments of learner autonomy in language learning and the modes of its promotion and then 'tests' them with a research from practice including 40 university students of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) courses at the South East European University (SEEU). The aim of the research is to check to what extent university students have developed their autonomy in learning English and if there are any issues related to that, taking into consideration the present educational model in a country in transition with the reminisces of the traditional way of teaching and learning still present in the state schools in Macedonia. The findings might be of use to English teachers and educational policy makers.

Key words: learner autonomy, transition, responsibility, English.

1. Introduction

For many centuries, philosophers and since 1800s psychologists have been concerned with the question how people learn. According to Driscoll (2005), the study of learning should deal with two issues: the nature of knowledge and how we come to know things. Different

theorists take opposing views on these questions. Some believe that knowledge is primarily acquired through experience, whereas others argue that it is a matter of interpretations that learners construct actively in their mind. With the developments of computers after World War II, a concrete way of thinking about learning was provided as a framework for interpreting early work on memory, perception and learning. Stimuli became inputs, behavior became outputs. And what happened in between was conceived as cognitive information processing (CIP).

We believe that this “cognitive revolution in learning” (Shultz, 1998, p. 295), sets the roots of learning autonomy because of the two foundational concepts in the cognitivist tradition in the psychology of learning and human development: metacognition and self-regulation. According to Brown (Shultz, 1998), p. 295, “metacognition deals with how we acquire strategies for learning, remembering, understanding and problem solving”, while the concept of self-regulation is important to understand how we learn to master strategies for achieving self-control over those cognitive processes as one of the most critical components in defining learner autonomy. On the other hand, Smith (2008) points out that autonomy as a concept was originally imported from the fields of politics and moral philosophy, but the term learner autonomy was first mentioned as such at the Pedagogical Research Centre at the University of Nancy, France in the early 1970s as a result of the need to come up with a notion that could describe people’s ability to take charge of their own learning.

In education in general and in foreign language learning, learner autonomy has received a great focus in the last three decades and is often referred to as students’ active participation in learning activities (Dang, 2013) although it seems that the most exploited definition of learner autonomy in the literature is the one by Holec (in Thanasoulas, 2013, p.1) according to which, “it is the ability to take charge of one’s learning.”

2. Developing learner autonomy in language learning

Language teachers are aware that the language teaching practice have shifted focus from a traditional to a more communicative approach that is, from knowing about the language to using the language for real, communicative purposes. At the same time, the teaching has become more student-centered because research has shown that students show best results when they are actively involved in the learning process. (Nunan, 1993). This is also in line with the modern theories of learning, according to which learners should construct their own meaning and upgrade their knowledge based on what they already know with the following points as basic principles: (Anderson, Reder and Simon, 2000 in Driscoll, 2005 p. 407): "Only the active learner is a successful learner; learning from examples and learning by doing enable learners to achieve deep levels of understanding; learning with understanding is what is desired, not rote learning; the social structure of the learning environment is important."

There are a number of areas in which learners should progress if they have increased their autonomy in language learning (Littlewood, 1996). They need to be able to make their own choices in grammar and vocabulary (for ex. in role plays), to choose the meanings they want to express when they communicate, to make more far-reaching decisions about goals, meanings and strategies (for ex. in problem solving activities and discussions). Then, according to the same author, autonomous language learners should begin to choose and shape their own learning context (ex. in project work) and become able to make decisions in domains which have traditionally belonged to the teacher (ex. about material selection and learning tasks). In addition to this, learners should participate in determining the nature and progression of their own syllabus (Budd and Wright 1992 in Littlewood, 1996) and they need to become able to use the language for communication and learning independently in situations of their choice outside the classroom.

The literature defines other characteristics of autonomous language learners (Thanasoulas, 2000). Besides the active approach to the learning task at hand, he points out that they have insights into their learning styles and strategies; they are willing to take risks, i.e. to communicate in the target language at all costs and be good guessers. Autonomous language learners pay attention both to accuracy and fluency and have a tolerant and outgoing approach to the target language. We, as teachers should provide conditions for the autonomy to happen gradually by taking care of all the elements involved in its creation and fostering. As Thanasoulas (2013) points out, 'autonomy is a process, not a product (p.3). Learners need to work on developing their autonomy through the educational process.

Several authors list strategy development as the key factor in promoting learner autonomy (Littlewood, 1996, Thanasoulas, 2013, Yang, 1998, Oxford and Burry-Stock, 1998). Oxford (2003) defines learning strategies as "specific actions, behaviors, steps, or techniques – such as seeking out conversation partners, or giving oneself encouragement to tackle a difficult language task – used by students to enhance their own learning" (p. 2) If the learner intentionally chooses a strategy that matches his/her teaching style, then this strategy becomes a tool for self-regulation of the learning. According to this author, learning strategies can be classified into six groups: cognitive, metacognitive, memory-related, compensatory, affective, and social.

We will list the different types of strategies, as identified by Oxford, (2003), because of their positive outcome in language learning. Cognitive strategies include mental activities such as reasoning, analysis, summarizing, synthesizing, outlining and note-taking that enable the learner to deal with the material to be learnt in direct ways. Metacognitive strategies are related to identifying one's learning styles, preferences and needs and according to Purpura (1999 in Oxford, 2003) they have a direct effect on cognitive strategy use in task completion. Memory-related strategies help learners link the items of the target language, but do not necessarily involve deep understanding. Purpura also claims that they help learners memorize vocabulary and structure in initial stages of language learning, but at later stages when the amount of vocabulary and structures has

become larger, these strategies are not needed that much. There are compensatory strategies, that refer to guessing from the context in listening and reading for example, then using synonyms and paraphrasing the word and they help learners to make up for missing knowledge. Affective strategies are those that are related to identifying one's mood and anxiety level, using deep breathing or positive self-talk etc. The last group of strategies is the social strategies help the learner work with others and understand the target language and culture and they include strategies such as asking questions to get verification, asking for explanation, interacting with native speakers etc.

It is the teachers' role to include strategy instruction in their classes because in that way they directly assist students in becoming more autonomous and improve their language proficiency. We assume that the majority of teachers do not teach the strategy use as a special instruction method, but it is rather embedded into everyday teaching.

3. Research Methodology

The aim of our study was to see to which extent students have developed their learning autonomy themselves and whether they have understanding of it or this process has occurred spontaneously as they were becoming more mature and proficient in the target language. We wanted to compare what the literature says about development of learning autonomy and how the situation really is in practice.

In order to find out more about the state of the art of learning autonomy, three instruments were used: a questionnaire for students, informal interviews with their English teachers and review of the observation feedback forms. Data gathered from all the three instruments are expected to help us find out some more information about the situation with learner autonomy from the perspective of the learners, their teachers and the third side – observers.

3.1 Student questionnaire

The student questionnaire was administered to 39 students from the second year of study at the South East European University (SEEU) drawn from their English for Specific Purposes courses (ESP) as follows: 12 from ESP for Legal Studies, 15 from ESP for Computer Sciences and 12 from ESP for Business. It was assumed that students attending these courses had already developed some learner autonomy and also become quite proficient users of English. Their age was between 20 and 22 years and almost all of them had been learning English since their fifth grade at elementary school, which counted for 10 years of continuous English instruction. The questionnaire consisted of 12 questions related to students' perceptions about learner autonomy which were formulated as statements and answered on a Likert scale.

3.2 Interviews with English teachers

In order to see teachers' views of the same problematic concerning development of learner autonomy and their role in it, we interviewed the three teachers that taught the courses from which students were taken to answer the questionnaire. The conversation with them was developed around one main topic: what they were doing about developing of learner autonomy in their English classes. We wanted to find out if they were aware of the learning strategies and taught them separately or it was a part of the regular teaching and then compare this information with the results of the questionnaire.

3.3 Review of the observation forms

The observation process is one of the quality instruments developed at SEEU and in which every single teacher is observed annually by two members of staff who were trained previously. For the purpose of our study, we considered all feedback forms from the academic 2012/2013 year in order to see if they contained any remarks, whether positive or negative, about promoting learner autonomy. This was supposed to give us information about the

awareness of both the teachers and observers (they are teaching as well) of the notion of learner autonomy and its development.

4. Discussion of findings

4.1 Results from the student questionnaire

With regard to the first question of the student questionnaire, "I prefer studying on my own rather than being guided by a teacher", 36% of students examined answered positively and 41% negatively¹. This was a pretty balanced result with only a slight advantage of the negative answers. The second question, "During my previous education, I have learned how to study more easily and successfully" brought more obvious result because 74% of the answers were positive and only 5% negative. This means that students of this age and this educational level have managed to develop their own skills and strategies for better learning. On the third question, "I believe that my own learning is too much controlled by educational institutions (schools, ministries, etc.)", 28% of the students answered in favor of the statement and 20% were negative about it, but there were also 20% neutral answers. Therefore we cannot derive any conclusion about this aspect. The big percentage of neutral students might mean that they lack information about this particular issue. The fourth question was about self-responsibility: "I am the most responsible one for my own learning". Here we had a clear situation with 69% positive and 18% negative answers meaning that majority of students have made it clear that their success is in their hands to a very big extent.

On the fifth questions, "I prefer to determine the directions of my own learning", there were 85% positive answers and no negative answer and again a clear situation in favor of development of learner autonomy with students. The sixth question, "When speaking a foreign language I am ready to communicate in it even if I make

¹ Positive and negative answers were merged and neutral ones were ignored but commented when their number was significant for the results

mistakes" also gave a clear picture with 90% positive answers and only 5% negative, meaning that these students do not hesitate to use the language even if they are aware that they are not perfect in it. This is another characteristic of developed learner autonomy in language learning. Question number 7, "I have my own ways of learning a foreign language" resulted with 71% positive and no negative answers. The situation was quite clear with the next question, as well: "I am tolerant towards the mistakes that other people make when learning a foreign language". To this question, 78% of the students answered with 'yes', only 2% answered with 'no'. The ninth question was about self-initiative in learning: "I take an active approach; I engage myself with the learning task and do not wait for somebody else to do it for me". Here also the students showed great awareness and 85% answered positively, 5% negatively and there were 14 students that were neutral. Question number 10 was about a learning strategy: "When I don't know the meaning of a word, I try to improvise or guess it". 79% of students gave positive answers to this question and 15% negative. The last two questions regarding teacher's role did not produce very clear picture in favor of one attitude. Question number 11, "I prefer a more traditional role of the teacher: when he or she lectures and gives me tasks to do" had 46% positive answers, 15% negative and 44% of students that were neutral. Similarly, the last question, "I like when the teacher facilitates my learning, but leaves more space for my own efforts", had 56% positive answers and 5% negative, again with a high percentage of neutral answers – 39%.

4.2 Comments from the interview with teachers

The three teachers whose students answered the questionnaire were asked to give opinion around the topic of promoting learner autonomy with their students: what they do in order to achieve it and if they use any special teaching methods to develop the autonomy with their students.

Expectedly, their answers were mainly focused on the methodology that promotes student-centeredness: organizing group and pair

work, peer checking, activating prior knowledge, engaging students in critical thinking skills, work on projects outside the classroom, using the University learning management system (LIBRI). None of the three teachers mentioned that they taught some learning strategies which are considered critical for promoting autonomy.

4.3 Analysis of teaching observations feedback

During the academic 2012/13 year, 32 full-time teachers from the LC were observed as a part of the annual teaching observation process. Observed points of good practice could be generalized as follows: students interested in class, group work, prior knowledge activated, students willing to contribute, working on posters as a team, doing presentations. Good points observed about the teachers included: starting the lesson with revision of the previous material, linking examples with real life, using different activities, checking on progress, giving clear instructions.

As areas for improvement, observers mostly wrote about the following: inadequate error correction, inappropriate level of difficulty for the particular class, having too many activities and rushing through them, engaging all students by allowing more time for answers, posing individual questions rather than addressing all class.

It was evident that no single comment in any area was made specifically about activities that promote learner autonomy that is in line with the assumption that teachers in practice understand the learner autonomy as a constituent part of an active learner-centered class.

5. Conclusions and recommendations

From all the three instruments used for data collection, it can be concluded that at least for University students, learner autonomy is not a new concept and that they have managed to develop it to a significant extent during their previous education. We base this conclusion on the data from student questionnaire, according to which majority of students have estimated their own learning skills

as being improved and advanced with the years spent at school. Students have also showed that they are aware of being the most critical factor for their own progress in learning although they were not ready to study completely on their own; they recognize the role of their teachers. Further on, if characteristics such as: being ready to communicate in the foreign language, being tolerant for the mistakes that others make, guessing the meaning of a new word and having one's own way of learning a language are known to be some of the features of autonomous language learners, then the conclusion is that in our case, based on the answers given to items measuring these perceptions, students are autonomous.

Now the question is to what extent their teachers have contributed to achieving that level of autonomy. It is evident from students' answers that they are not ready and willing to embark on their learning task without the role of the teachers, but at the same time the teachers are preferred to be more facilitators rather than pure transmitters of knowledge. The fact that in the educational system of Macedonia and Kosovo, the countries from most of the students at SEEU come, there are still teachers that are product of the old, more traditional way of teaching, can explain some of the answers that were not in favor of learner autonomy, although they were not a lot in number. What is more, the English teachers, both in Macedonia and especially in Kosovo are from the younger generation and they have received a lot of methodological training both during their formal education and after getting employed.

Another obvious conclusion from the two other instruments used – the interview with teachers and review of the observation forms show that teachers seem to understand promotion of the learner autonomy as one of the constituents of learner –centeredness and hence the methodology used for both is the same: creating various activities that enhance student interactivity, pair and group work, role plays, work on case studies and projects, questioning techniques that lead to developing critical thinking skills, using of social networks and other technological tools in teaching, team work set for work outside class etc. Teaching learning strategies, recommended by the literature as an essential factor of developing

learner autonomy, is probably embedded in teaching, but none of the teachers have mentioned it, nor has it been noticed as a comment in any of the 32 observation forms reviewed. Therefore, it is recommended that first of all, the awareness is raised among teachers about the necessity of using different techniques through reflective practices that will contribute to examining one's own teaching.

Then, training should be offered about how to teach different learning strategies. As Oxford (2003) points out, "skilled teachers help their students develop an awareness of learning strategies and enable them to use a wide range of appropriate strategies". (p. 9). In her extensive work on researching the benefits of strategy use by students, this author claims that in order to perform the most effective strategy instruction, teachers need to demonstrate to students when a certain strategy might be useful and to demonstrate it with real tasks and examples. And this instruction should be embedded into regular, everyday L2 teaching.

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Vita Kilar / University of Ljubljana

„Geschäftskommunikation auf Deutsch“: Vorstellung eines Studienfachs an der Wirtschaftsfakultät der Universität Ljubljana, Slowenien

Der Zweck des vorliegenden Beitrags ist, den fach- und fremdsprachlichen Kurs „Geschäftskommunikation auf Deutsch“ an der Wirtschaftsfakultät der Universität Ljubljana vorzustellen, bei dessen Realisierung die Autorin verschiedene Methoden der Lernerautonomie zu kombinieren sucht, um die Heterogenität der Lerner in Griff zu bekommen: Individualarbeit, Gruppenarbeit, Vor-Ort-Arbeit (Fallsimulationen während Seminartreffen) und Portfolio. Die Analyse bezieht sich auf die Kursausführung im Sommersemester des akademischen Jahres 2012/13.

Die Kursgestaltung beruht auf der Idee, die Studierenden für ihr berufliches Wirken nicht nur sprachlich vorzubereiten, sondern sie durch eine Kombination aus selbständigem und interaktivem Lernen zum souveränen Handeln in deutschsprachiger Umgebung zu befähigen. Aus diesem Grund versuchte die Autorin, den Kurs auf Grundsätzen der Lernerautonomie aufzubauen, die auf zwei Ebenen eingesetzt werden, und zwar in Bezug auf den Inhalt mit Einführung eines Leitmotivs, und im Bereich der Methodologie durch Kombination mehrerer Methoden. Bei deren Auswahl stellte die Autorin an erste Stelle die Authentizität, was sie zur Einführung der Vor-Ort-Arbeit veranlasste. Als Mittel der Binnendifferenzierung benutzte sie das „Leitmotiv“: die Rahmeninhalte sind für alle Lerner gleich, zusätzlich zu diesen Inhalten wird ein wortschatzspezifisches Thema eingeführt, z.B. Nachhaltigkeit. Die Rahmentopics werden je nach Sprachkompetenz der Lerner aus verschiedenen Perspektiven erörtert, wobei die Fortgeschrittenen die Grundthemen, die ihnen schon von vornherein bekannt sind, aus verschiedenen Perspektiven des Leitmotivs bearbeiten. Das Ziel des Beitrags ist es, aufzuklären, inwieweit ein solcher didaktischer Ansatz für den fremdsprachlichen Unterricht in heterogenen Gruppen auf der Tertiärebene geeignet ist.

Key Words: Binnendifferenzierung, Heterogenität, Leitmotiv, Lernerautonomie, Tertiärebene

This paper introduces the foreign-language technical terminology course "Business Communication in German" at the University of Ljubljana's Faculty of Economics. In this course, the author combines various forms of learner autonomy in order to deal with learners' heterogeneity: individual work, group work, on-site work (in-class case study simulation), and portfolio. The analysis refers to the course performance in the summer semester of the academic year 2012/13.

The course design is based on the idea that students should not only be linguistically prepared for their future work, but also empowered for autonomous communication in a German-speaking environment through a combination of independent and interactive learning. The author therefore sought to build the course on principles of learner autonomy, which are used at two levels: in relation to the content with the introduction of a theme, and in the methodology by combining several methods. In selecting these methods, the author gave primacy to authenticity, which led her to introduce interactive in-class projects. She used the "theme" as a means of internal differentiation: the frame topics are the same for all learners, and a vocabulary-specific topic is also introduced, such as "sustainability." The frame topics are discussed from various perspectives depending on the learners' language competence, and the advanced students discuss the basic themes that they already know from various thematic perspectives.

This paper aims to clarify the extent to which this type of didactic approach to foreign-language teaching in heterogeneous groups is suitable at the tertiary level.

Key Words: Internal differentiation, heterogeneity, theme, learner autonomy, tertiary level

1. Einleitung

Die Heterogenität der Gruppen im Unterricht, seit den 80-ern in der Ausbildung eine Realität und weltweit ein Thema pädagogischer und didaktischer Forschung, wurde im letzten Jahrzehnt auch in Slowenien mit zunehmender Differenzierung der Gesellschaft immer offensichtlicher und aktueller. Seit der Einführung der Bologna-Reform breitete sich die Problematik auch auf den Bereich der Tertiärbildung aus. Die Gruppenheterogenität bedeutet immer eine große Herausforderung, sowohl für Pädagogen als auch für Lerner.

Die These der Autorin war, dass es durch gezielte, der jeweiligen Gruppendynamik angepasste Methodenkombination des bereits an

sich interdisziplinär orientierten Lernautoniekonzepts¹ möglich ist, die Vorteile der Heterogenität (in der Gruppe anders denkender / begabter / motivierter Menschen erfolgreich funktionieren und somit zur Produktivität der Gruppe als Ganzen beizutragen) unter günstigen Rahmenbedingungen² produktiv zu nutzen, so dass sie von allen Beteiligten als etwas Positives wahrgenommen und erkannt werden können. So verstanden, kann die Heterogenität dem Kurs einen Mehrwert verleihen, indem neben den sprachlichen auch kommunikative Fertigkeiten (soft skills) weiterentwickelt und die erworbenen Kenntnisse sowie Lernstrategien und -techniken fachübergreifend übertragbar werden.

Das Ziel der Untersuchung war es, festzustellen, wie sich einzelne Methoden der Lernerautonomie für einen 36-stündigen, durch hohe Teilnehmerheterogenität geprägten fremd- und fachsprachlichen Kurs „Geschäftskommunikation auf Deutsch“ eignen, der im dritten Studienjahr an der Fakultät für Wirtschaftswissenschaften der Universität Ljubljana als Wahlfach angeboten wird, und welche sich als nützlichste erwiesen, sowohl aus der Sicht der Studierenden als auch aus der Perspektive der Dozentin. Die Analyse bezieht sich auf die Kursausführung im Sommersemester des akademischen Jahres 2012/13. In ihrer Forschung kombinierte die Autorin qualitative und quantitative Methoden und zwar teilnehmende Beobachtung, halbstrukturiertes Interview und Fragebogen.

2.Theoretische ausgangspunkte

Der Begriff der Lernerautonomie wird in der Fachliteratur unter verschiedenen Aspekten betrachtet, was von der Komplexität dieses Konzeptes zeugt. Nach Wolff (1996: 554-555) wird seit Holec (1981) die Autonomie als die Fähigkeit aufgefasst, Verantwortung für das

¹ Wie Danielle Bachel (2005:3) zusammenfasst: „[...] was allen Definitionen jedoch gleich ist, ist das vorrangige Ziel von Lernerautonomie, über den Fremdsprachenunterricht hinaus zu gehen und übertragbar auf unzählige Bereiche zu sein.“

² Zu den wichtigsten Erfolgsbedingungen zählt die Autorin die Motiviertheit der Beteiligten, gute Kursorganisation, klar gesetzte Ziele und genügend Zeit für die Ausführung; siehe Schlussfolgerungen.

eigene Lernen zu übernehmen. In seinem Werk aus dem Jahr 2003 wird Autonomie aus einer breiteren Perspektive betrachtet: „[...] das Begriffsverständnis schwankt zwischen Autonomie als einem Erziehungsziel, als einem didaktisch-methodischen Ansatz, als einer Fähigkeit, die der Lernende mitbringt, und als einem Prozess, den zu gestalten, die Aufgabe des Lernenden ist, den aber der Lehrende fördern kann“ (vgl. Wolff 2003: 322).

In Bensons Überblick der einschlägigen Literatur (Benson, 2006: 21ff) wird betont, dass Autonomie eine kontextvariable Größe darstellt, wobei auf neue Aspekte der Forschung im fremdsprachlichen Lernen und Lehren hingewiesen wird, die die Autonomie in der Interaktion mit Konzepten der Selbstregulation, Motivation und Lernstrategien beleuchten, sie aus dem Gesichtspunkt unterschiedlicher soziokultureller Theorien betrachten und ihre Rolle in der globalen Bildungspolitik und –Reform untersuchen. Komorowska (2001) versteht die Autonomie als Fähigkeit, unterschiedliche Aufgaben selbständig (alleine oder auch mit anderen Lernern), in einer neuen Situation, elastisch und kreativ zu lösen (Pawlowska 2008:168). Manche Autoren benutzen statt *Autonomie* den Begriff *Selbststeuerung*, „weil Lernerautonomie ein sehr anspruchsvoller Begriff ist, sozusagen ein Ideal, das in der Wirklichkeit kaum je erreicht werden dürfte.“ (Apeltauer 2008:20). Sie sei auch kein Dauerzustand: sie ergibt sich nicht einfach und kann auch nicht auf Dauer aufrechterhalten werden (ebenda, 23).

Es liegt auf der Hand, dass die erwähnten theoretischen Prinzipien der Lernerautonomie in engem Zusammenhang mit der Heterogenitätsproblematik stehen bzw. auf eine enge Verbindung sowie Ergänzung beider Bereiche schließen lassen. Dabei ist ein weiterer Begriff einzuführen: der der Binnendifferenzierung. Unter diesem Begriff werden alle Differenzierungsformen aufgefasst, die innerhalb einer gemeinsam unterrichteten Lernergruppe vorgenommen werden, um mit den Unterschieden der Lernenden umzugehen, ohne die gemeinsame Gruppe dauerhaft aufzuteilen (Aschemann 2011). In einer Zeit, wo auch im Bereich der Hochschulbildung eine immer größere Heterogenität zu beobachten ist und aus bildungspolitischen Gründen selten Möglichkeiten einer äußeren Differenzierung

gegeben werden, scheinen Methoden der Binnendifferenzierung³ (ebenda: 4,5; vgl. Demmig 2008) auch für diesen Bereich geeignet zu sein. Es ist nämlich unmöglich, das Angebot an Studienfächern so zu gestalten, dass es allen Lernern gerecht werden kann, weswegen man auf eine Lerner selbstständigkeit und nicht auf Individualisierung größeren Wert legt (Pawlowska 2008: 170, vgl. Bimmel, Rampillon 2000:178). Eine zum Erfolg führende Binnendifferenzierung ist allerdings sehr anspruchsvoll, setzt eine genaue Eingangsdiagnose sowie ständiges Monitoring der Lerner voraus, was auch viel Zeit beansprucht, die des Dozenten, um die nötigen Zusatzvorbereitungen zu treffen, als auch die der Kursteilnehmer selbst. (Aschemann 2011:4). Trotz dieser Einschränkung scheinen Methoden der Binnendifferenzierung bei entsprechender Modifizierung auch auf der Tertiärstufe anwendbar, vor allem in kleineren heterogenen Gruppen, wo die Unterschiede der Teilnehmer produktiv genützt werden können, um den Bedürfnissen aller Studierenden zumindest bis zu einem gewissen Ausmaß gerecht zu werden.

**GEGENSTAND DER ANALYSE: DER KURS
„GESCHÄFTSKOMMUNIKATION AUF DEUTSCH“ (Wahlfach an
der Wirtschaftsfakultät der Universität Ljubljana)**

3. Ausgangspunkte

Um das Jahr 2000 ist das Interesse an Deutsch auch in Slowenien stark gesunken. Zum einen trug dazu die massive Anglisierung des Wirtschaftsbereichs bei, zum anderen die Bologna-Reform, die das fremdsprachliche Curriculum im Hoch- und Universitätswesen auf nur eine Fremdsprache reduzierte, was auch an der Wirtschaftsfakultät der Fall gewesen ist, oder diese sogar abgeschafft hatte. Erwartungsgemäß entschieden sich die meisten Studierenden für das Englische als die überall proklamierte „Universalsprache“. Um das Interesse für Deutsch wieder zu wecken, haben die Dozentinnen der Wirtschaftsfakultät in Ljubljana das Deutschangebot gründlich umstrukturiert, um es somit für die Studierenden interessanter zu

³ Über verschiedene Ausrichtungen der Binnendifferenzierung vgl. auch Bönsch (2008), Scholz (2007), Kaufmann (2007), Kiper (2008)

machen. Seit 2009/10 ist das Angebot in zwei Schwierigkeitsstufen diversifiziert – für Anfänger und für Fortgeschrittene. Darüber hinaus haben die Studierenden die Möglichkeit, im Wahlfach, das im dritten Studienjahr angeboten wird, ihr Deutsch berufsspezifisch „aufzupolieren“ und zu verbessern. Beim Aufbau des Kurskonzeptes sind vielfach die Prinzipien der Lernerautonomie berücksichtigt worden, was in der Fortsetzung näher vorgestellt wird. Das autonome Lernen wird in zwei Schritten eingesetzt: in der theoretischen Phase müssen die Studierenden selbst einschätzen, was und wieviel von in vorab gegebenen Lehrmaterialien (sprachliche Bausteine, Wortschatz) jeder bearbeiten muss, um die sich auf einzelne Case-Schritte beziehende Aufgaben (Präsentation, Korrespondenz etc.) ausführen zu können (Element der Selbstreflexion). In der praktischen Phase steht das autonome Lernen von Kommunikationsfertigkeiten, Organisation, Selbstdisziplin und Kooperationskompetenz im Mittelpunkt: während der Fallsimulation im Seminar (Verhandlungen, Vorstellungsgespräche etc.) sind die Studierende nämlich „gezwungen“, ihre diesbezüglichen Kompetenzen selbständig zu überprüfen, wobei das Feed-Back der Dozentin sowie das Peer-Review der Kollegen erst nach jeder praktischen Phase stattfindet.

Das Hauptziel der Dozentin war, die Studierenden zur Einsicht in ihre Kompetenzen zu befähigen, damit sie sich ihrer Stärken und Schwächen bewusst werden und mit ihnen besser umgehen und entsprechende Lernstrategien entwickeln können. Darüber hinaus gab es jedoch auch zwei praktische Gründe für den Einsatz eines solchen Konzepts: zum ersten die Kürze des Programms (6 Wochen), was einen klassischen Ansatz nicht zulässt, und zweitens die hohe Heterogenität der Teilnehmer.

4. Inhalt und -Methoden

Bei der Auswahl von Inhalten spielte der begrenzte zeitliche Rahmen der Ausführung (36 Stunden) eine große Rolle. Um den Wünschen, Erwartungen sowie dem Bedarf aller Interessenten entgegenzukommen, hat man sich inhaltlich auf die Grundtextsorten der geschäftlichen Kommunikation konzentriert. Zu Beginn des

Kurses werden Studierende mit theoretischen Grundsätzen sowie mit sprachlichen Bausteinen der einzelnen Kommunikationstextsorten (Geschäftskorrespondenz, Präsentation, Besprechungen und Verhandlungen, Bewerbung mit CV, Vorstellungsgespräch) bekannt gemacht. Zudem werden ihnen Links zu den einzelnen Themen sowie zu den ausgewählten während des Kurses zu verfolgenden Medien an die Hand gegeben. Sie werden auch auf eventuelle interkulturelle Unterschiede unter den deutschsprachigen Ländern aufmerksam gemacht. Da allerdings diejenigen Studierenden, die zwei Semester des Deutschen bereits absolviert hatten, die Hauptcharakteristika und Standardformulierungen der einzelnen Textsorten schon kennen, ist das sogenannte inhaltliche „Leitmotiv“ eingeführt worden. Dieses variiert von Jahr zu Jahr - während der dargestellten Ausführung ging es um das Thema „Nachhaltigkeit“. In der Praxis bedeutete das, dass sich die Kursteilnehmer mit Grundkenntnissen auf die für sie neuen Inhalte, d.h. Kommunikationstextsorten, konzentrierten, wobei die anspruchsvolleren und kompetenteren versuchten, bei der Beschäftigung mit schon bekannten Themen verschiedene Leitmotiv Aspekte sowie den Wortschatz zu dieser Problematik miteinzubeziehen: bei einer Firmenpräsentation sollten sie zum Beispiel herausfinden, welche Aspekte der Nachhaltigkeit das jeweilige Unternehmen in den Vordergrund stellt, was dann diskutiert und bei der Erstellung von Stellenausschreibungen, Bewerbungen und Lebensläufen berücksichtigt wurde.

Die im Kurs eingesetzten Methoden waren: Gruppenarbeit, Partnerarbeit, Portfolio, freie (selbständige) Arbeit und Vor-Ort-Arbeit. Bei der letzteren agierten die Kursteilnehmer in einzelnen Fallstudien als Vertreter realer deutscher Unternehmen und kommunizierten während des Seminars, das in computerausgestatteten Räumen abgehalten wurde, live oder online miteinander. Dabei ging es oft um Situationen, die nach sofortiger Reaktion verlangten. Auf diese Weise kann jeder seine Stärken und Schwächen erkennen und gleich beginnen, gemeinsam mit den Kollegen und der Dozentin nach deren Lösungen zu suchen, was auch ein positiver Stimulus ist.

5. Zielgruppen

Es war zu erwarten, dass sich für das Wahlfach diejenigen Studierenden entscheiden werden, die Englisch als die Pflichtsprache gewählt haben und nun anschließend im sechsten Semester ihre schulischen Deutschkenntnisse auffrischen und fachsprachlich auf- und ausbauen wollen. In der bisherigen Praxis zeigte es sich allerdings, dass neben der zu erwartenden Zielgruppe der Kurs auch von solchen Lernern gewählt wurde, die als Pflichtfach Deutsch und nicht Englisch absolviert hatten. Doch ist auch diese Zielgruppe in sich nicht einheitlich – aufgrund der Diversifizierung des Programms in zwei Schwierigkeitsstufen schließt sie sowohl Hörer mit A2-Kenntnissen (gemäß dem Gemeinsamen Europäischen Referenzrahmen) als auch solche auf der B1-, B2- und einige sogar auf der C-Ebene ein. Bei der zweiten und dritten Zielgruppe handelt es sich demnach um Ökonomiestudenten, die mit den Grundbausteinen der Geschäftskommunikation in vorangehenden Kursen bereits vertraut gemacht worden sind – allerdings in unterschiedlichem Ausmaß und unterschiedlicher Tiefe.

Zudem gibt es noch eine weitere Zielgruppe: Studierende anderer Fakultäten ohne Ökonomiekennntnisse, die allerdings mit sehr guten Sprachkenntnissen ausgerüstet sind. Am stärksten vertreten bei dieser Gruppe sind Studierende von naturwissenschaftlichen Fächern (Pharmazie, Mathematik und Chemie), sowie Jurastudenten.

Tabelle 1: Durchschnittliche Zielgruppenzusammensetzung

Ökonomiestudierende <u>ohne</u> Deutsch als Fachsprache (Pflichtsprache Englisch), gute schulische Kenntnisse, Abitur: B1, B2	25 %
Ökonomiestudierende mit absolviertem Deutsch (Pflichtsprache Deutsch): Beginner-Ebene A1,A2	25 %
Ökonomiestudierende mit absolviertem Deutsch (Pflichtsprache Deutsch): B1-B2, C1 (1 Student)	35 %
Studierende anderer Fakultäten <u>ohne</u> Deutsch als Fachsprache, gute schulische Kenntnisse, Abitur: B1-B2	15 %

Zusammenfassend charakterisieren sich die vier Zielgruppen durch zwei Hauptmerkmale: einerseits durch eine hohe Heterogeni-

tät der Teilnehmer in Bezug auf ihre Vorkenntnisse und Erwartungen und andererseits durch ihre unterschiedliche Motiviertheit.

5. Resultate

Die Überprüfung der Angemessenheit des dargelegten didaktischen Ansatzes sowie seiner Eignung zur Arbeit in heterogenen Gruppen geschah mittels drei Methoden: der teilnehmenden Beobachtung, des halbstrukturierten Interviews und des Fragebogens.

5.1 Teilnehmende Beobachtung

Bei den Lernern wurden folgende Größen beobachtet: ihre Motivation, ihr Portfolio und ihre Soft Skills, vor allem die Teamfähigkeit, Flexibilität und Kooperationsbereitschaft. Ökonomiestudierende mit Englisch als Pflichtsprache sowie Studierende anderer Fakultäten haben die angewandten Methoden akzeptiert und beteiligten sich sehr aktiv. Alle waren hoch motiviert und zeigten sich bereit, viel von ihrer (Frei)zeit in ihre Arbeiten zu investieren, was auch aus ihren Portfolios ersichtlich war. Auch bei der Arbeit in gemischten und nicht fixen Teilgruppen waren sie flexibel. Insbesondere die Zusammenarbeit unter Studierenden verschiedener Fakultäten (Ökonomen, Naturwissenschaftlern, Juristen) war sehr produktiv und wurde in den Fragebögen auch von allen Beteiligten als positiv beurteilt.

Die Ökonomiestudenten, die das Pflichtfach *Deutsch als Wirtschafts- und Geschäftssprache* bereits im zweiten Studienjahr absolviert hatten, allerdings auf verschiedenen Schwierigkeitsgraden, waren eher zurückhaltend. Sie tendierten zur Projektarbeit in homogenen Kleingruppen und zeigten sich bei der Zusammenführung von Studierenden mit sehr guten und solchen mit geringeren fremdsprachlichen Kompetenzen eher distanziert, wie auch Scholz in ihren Ausführungen über die PA (Partnerarbeit) zum Ausdruck bringt: „...Schließlich sei darauf hingewiesen, dass die meisten Schüler sich einen gleich starken oder allenfalls leistungsstärkeren Partner wünschen...“ (Scholz 2007: 19). Obwohl die Autorin zu Beginn des Kurses die Vorteile von zeitweiliger Arbeit in heterogenen Kleingruppen explizit erklärt hatte, schien es, als sähen sie darin nicht viel Sinn. Ihre Portfolio-Mappen waren von mäßiger Qualität und zeu-

gten von wenig Input, überraschenderweise auch bei Studierenden mit den besten Sprachkenntnissen.

5.2 Halbstrukturiertes Interview

Da bereits mit der Methode der teilnehmenden Beobachtung die weniger motivierten Zielgruppen identifiziert werden konnten, entschied sich die Autorin, Interviews nur mit Repräsentanten dieser Zielgruppen durchzuführen. Demnach wurden zwei Studierende mit vorhin abgeschlossenem Deutsch als Pflichtfach befragt. Der Befragte 1 (mit Sprachkenntnissen B2-C) mit dem Deutschprogramm für Fortgeschrittene vermisste beim Kurs enger spezialisierte Themen (Finanzen). Die Methoden fand er gelungen, vor allem die Vor-Ort-Arbeit, dennoch beklagte er sich vor allem über mangelnde sprachliche Kompetenz der Kollegen. Auf die Zwischenbemerkung der Autorin, dass es auch im realen Leben häufig vorkommen wird, mit Menschen von sehr unterschiedlichen Kompetenzen und Begabungen zusammenarbeiten zu müssen, reagierte der Befragte überrascht. Schließlich äußerte er sich dazu, dass er in dem Zusammenhang nicht auf einen solchen Gedanken gekommen sei, obwohl zu Beginn des Kurses ausdrücklich betont wurde, dass die Kursschwerpunkte nicht ausschließlich auf der Sprache liegen, da die menschliche Kommunikation auch viele nonverbale Elemente enthält und es das Ziel des Kurses war, neben der fremd- und fachsprachlichen Kompetenz auch die Flexibilität in Interaktionen, die Kooperationsbereitschaft und den -willen innerhalb heterogener Teams zu fördern. Der befragte Student hat nicht eingesehen, dass offensichtlich gerade im letzteren Bereich bei ihm ein Defizit besteht, dem auf den Grund zu kommen er während des Kursverlaufs nicht versucht hatte. Er nahm seine Reaktion in für ihn problematischen Interaktionen nicht bewusst und reflektierend wahr und bemühte sich nicht darum, festzustellen, was ihn bei der Zusammenarbeit mit „weniger kompetenten Kollegen“ störte.

Die Person 2 (A2-Niveau) berichtete, auf der inhaltlichen Ebene viel Neues erfahren zu haben. Es gefielen ihr besonders die vielen nützlichen Links und Anregungen für selbständige Arbeit. Zu der Gruppenheterogenität äußerte sich auch diese Person ambivalent: einerseits hat es ihr gefallen, in einem – obwohl simulierten ☐

deutschsprachigen Arbeitsmilieu zu sein. Andererseits gab sie zu, dass sie sich des Öfteren überfordert fühlte, obwohl sie sämtliche ihr auferlegten Aufgaben erfüllen konnte. Es war ihr zudem bewusst, dass ein Teil der Gruppe mit anderen, anspruchsvolleren Inhalten beschäftigt gewesen war, weswegen sie sich manchmal als „zweitrangig“ empfand, unfähig, da mitmachen zu können.

Beide Personen betonten, dass der Kurs ihren Erwartungen weitgehend entsprach und dass sie ihre Wahl nicht bedauerten.

5.3 Fragebogen

Aufgrund des begrenzten Umfangs des Beitrags ist es an dieser Stelle nicht möglich, auf den zweiseitigen Fragebogen näher einzugehen. Verallgemeinernd lässt sich sagen, dass die meisten Befragten die angewandten Methoden als mehr oder weniger positiv beurteilten. Vor allem gefiel ihnen die Authentizität des Seminars, die Vor-Ort-Arbeit und die Einführung des Leitmotivs.

Auf die Frage, ob sie die Heterogenität als störend empfanden, waren die Meinungen allerdings geteilt: eine Hälfte fühlte sich dadurch verunsichert, die andere empfand sie als interessante Neuigkeit und Anregung zu mehr Eigenaktivität.

6. Diskussion und Schlussfolgerungen

Die Resultate zeigen, dass die angewandten, auf Grundsätzen der Lernerautonomie basierenden Methoden bei den Studierenden als gut bewertet wurden, vor allem in Bezug auf ihre praxisnahe Orientierung und die Dynamik, die sie in das Seminar gebracht haben. Dennoch vermochten sie der Heterogenität nicht genügend zu begegnen (vgl. Pawlowska 2008:175), wie die Umfrageergebnisse, Interviewaussagen sowie die Beobachtung der Dozentin gezeigt haben. Ein Grund dafür kann in der Spezifität des slowenischen Hochschul- und Universitätssystems liegen, das keine Studiengebühren erhebt und den Studierenden zahlreiche Bonitäten gewährt: automatische (kostenfreie) Krankenversicherung, Anspruch auf subventionierte Verpflegung (Gutscheine, die nicht nur in Studentenkantinen, sondern auch in zahlreichen Restaurants einlösbar sind) sowie niedrige Besteuerung der Studentendarbeit (vgl. Domadenik, Farnik 2014b:

3).⁴ Das alles hatte zur Folge, dass die Zahl der Studierenden in Slowenien sehr hoch ist, seit der Unabhängigkeitserklärung 1991 hat sie sich bis zum akademischen Jahr 2011/12 sogar verdreifacht (Domadenik, Far nik 2014a: 7).⁵ Ein weiterer Faktor ist die Wirtschaftskrise und die daraus resultierende hohe Arbeitslosenquote der Diplomanden (Domadenik, Far nik 2014b: 1).⁶ Viele Studierende sind nämlich aus den vorher erwähnten Gründen nicht bestrebt, ihr Studium möglichst schnell abzuschließen und dementsprechend ist auch ihre Motiviertheit in Seminaren eingeschränkt und eine Reserviertheit gegenüber anspruchsvolleren Methoden, die ihre aktive Teilnahme erfordern, festzustellen. Lernerautonomie steht mit Selbstdisziplin, Selbständigkeit, Eigeninitiative, Problemlösungsvermögen, Kommunikations- und Teamfähigkeit, Flexibilität und Verantwortung in Zusammenhang. All das erfordert von Studierenden eine gewisse kognitive und emotionale Reife, welche ihnen einen weiteren Blick ermöglicht und es ihnen erlaubt, Probleme aus verschiedenen Perspektiven zu betrachten und verschiedene Lösungsmöglichkeiten zu erkennen. Das Ziel des Kurskonzeptes war, Studierende insbesondere dafür zu sensibilisieren. Es ist von grundlegender Bedeutung, bei so konzipierten Kursen günstige Rahmenbedingungen zu schaffen, und zwar dadurch, dass neben den Inhalten und Methoden auch deren Sinn und Ziele klargemacht werden, und das nicht nur zu Beginn, sondern immer wieder auch während des Kurses. Erschwerend dabei ist wohl, dass solche organisatorischen Vorbereitungen sehr viel Zeit des schon so knapp bemessenen Kursrahmens – sowie der der Dozentin – in Anspruch nehmen. Wie

⁴ “[...] Slovenian higher education system has an important specificity compared to most others. [...] Decision regarding graduation can have speculative motives since being a student is a favourable status among the youth. Having a student status enables favourable tax schemes for individuals as well as employers... .

[...] students can remain insured...”

⁵ Mehr über das slowenische Hochbildungssystem siehe in: Domadenik, Far nik 2014a: 7-9.

⁶ “[...] in times of economic downturn students are likely to prolong their study (because the opportunity cost of staying in school is lower)...”

sich bei der Analyse herausstellte, ist für den Erfolg hohe Motiviertheit unabdingbar – sowohl auf der Seite der Studierenden als auch bei der Dozentin – sowie die Fähigkeit der Lernenden, eigenverantwortlich zu handeln.

Studierende sollen nicht ausschließlich auf die sprachlichen Kurselemente bedacht sein, man soll sie darüber hinaus für die non-verbale Elemente der Kommunikation sensibilisieren, vor allem für die Kooperationsbereitschaft, wodurch auch ihre Empathie in sozialen Interaktionen gestärkt werden wird. Auf diese Weise können auch die weniger Motivierten zu Selbstreflexionen geführt werden, was die Grundlage für die Wendung von der Leistungsorientiertheit des Einzelnen zur Zielorientiertheit der Gruppe schaffen kann und das Phänomen der Heterogenität im Tertiärbereich in ein anderes Licht zu stellen vermag.

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Sprachförderung von Lehramtsstudierenden mit Deutsch als Zweitsprache – Fallbeispiel Pädagogische Hochschule Zug, Schweiz

Abstract

Lehramtsstudierende mit nicht-deutscher Erstsprache, die erst als Erwachsene in die Deutschschweiz kamen, sind in Studium und Beruf mit grossen sprachlichen Herausforderungen konfrontiert. Zur professionellen Kompetenz einer Primarlehrperson gehören hoch qualifizierte Sprachkompetenzen in der Schulsprache Deutsch (C2) wie auch mindestens einer der Fremdsprachen Französisch oder Englisch (jeweils C1). Hinzu kommt, dass die diglossische Situation in der Deutschschweiz mit einem umfassenden Dialektgebrauch und der Standardsprache als Unterrichtssprache besondere Anforderungen an die Deutschkenntnisse einer angehenden Lehrperson stellt.

Als Beispiel einer gezielten Unterstützung und Sprachförderung nicht-deutschsprachiger Lehramtsstudierender in der Deutschschweiz wird in diesem Beitrag das „Fachatelier Deutsch als Zweitsprache (DaZ)“ an der Pädagogischen Hochschule Zug (Schweiz) vorgestellt. Der Kurs baut zu einem hohen Grad auf Methoden des autonomen Lernens auf mit dem Ziel, die spezifischen individuellen Bedürfnisse der Kursteilnehmenden abzudecken sowie die angehenden Lehrpersonen auf weiteres Lernen im späteren (Unterrichts-)Alltag vorzubereiten. Der Kurs wurde in dieser Form von der Autorin als Dozentin konzipiert und im Jahr 2012/2013 mit einer Gruppe von fünf Studierenden unterrichtet.

Student teachers who first learnt German as a second language as adults face various linguistic challenges when studying and teaching in German speaking Switzerland. Professional standards for teachers at primary school require C2-level in German, the language of instruction, and C1-level in at least one of the foreign languages

French and English. The diglossic situation in German speaking Switzerland with its local dialects alongside Standard German makes additional demands. This paper presents a German as a second language course for student teachers conducted by the author with a group of five students in the year 2012/2013 at the University of Teacher Education in Zug, Switzerland. The course aims to train students in accordance with their specific needs for German language skills and is strongly based on methods of learner autonomy in order to cover the group members' individual needs and to equip them for further learning outside university.

1. EINLEITUNG

Die Lehramtsstudierende T. berichtet aus eigener Erfahrung, dass sie im Studium und in Praktika auf ihr mangelhaftes Deutsch angesprochen wird, was sie dazu motiviert und gegenüber Studienanforderungen verpflichtet, während des Studiums eingehend an ihren Sprachkompetenzen zu arbeiten. T. stammt aus Osteuropa und kam nach einem in der Heimat abgeschlossenen Ingenieurstudium in die Deutschschweiz, wo sie die Ausbildung zur Primarlehrerin in Angriff nahm.

In diversen Untersuchungen und Befragungen von Lehrpersonen mit anderssprachigem Hintergrund haben sich mangelnde Sprachkompetenzen in der Unterrichtssprache sowie ein fremdsprachiger Akzent als eine der zentralen Hürden für das Lehramtsstudium und den Lehrerberuf herausgestellt (z.B. Bigestans 2001, S. 71, Medien-Servicestelle Neue Österreicher/innen 2011, Georgi et al. 2011, S. 271, 235–237). Oft handelt es sich bei diesen Personen um Leute mit sogenanntem „Migrationshintergrund“.¹

¹ Der Begriff „Migrationshintergrund“ birgt ein paar Tücken. Bräu et al. (2013, S. 8–10) weisen anschaulich darauf hin, dass die Bezeichnung einer Personengruppe eine „Andersartigkeit“ zuschreibt, was impliziert, dass – in ihrem Fall in Deutschland – von einer Normalität ausgegangen wird, die eben keinen „Migrationshintergrund“ aufweist. Des Weiteren ist die mit „Migrationshintergrund“ bezeichnete Personengruppe derart heterogen, dass Zuschreibungen anhand eines übergeordneten Begriffs den Sachverhalt zwangsläufig simplifizieren und verzerren. Das Bundesamts für Statistik der Schweiz (Schweizerische Eidgenossenschaft. Bundesamt für Statistik

Bezogen auf die Sprachkompetenzen in der Schulsprache ist für einen mehrsprachigen Staat wie die Schweiz der an nationale Zugehörigkeit gekoppelte Begriff „Migrationshintergrund“ allerdings nicht hinreichend, um die Zielgruppe der Lehramtsstudierenden mit Deutsch als Zweitsprache zu erfassen. Studierende aus anderssprachigen Landesteilen wie der französischsprachigen Westschweiz, dem italienischsprachigen Tessin und italienisch- respektive rätoromanischsprachigen Gebieten in Graubünden gehören auch dazu.

An diese Studierenden werden in Studium und Beruf hohe sprachliche Anforderungen gestellt, was, wie einleitend erwähnt, zu Schwierigkeiten führen kann und nach spezifisch auf die Sprachförderung ausgerichteten Kursangeboten verlangt. Im Folgenden geht es nach einer kurzen Übersicht über die Spracherwerbssituation und Studienanforderungen für fremdsprachige Lehramtsstudierende in der Deutschschweiz darum, am Beispiel des Förderkurses „Fachatelier Deutsch als Zweitsprache“ an der Pädagogischen Hochschule Zug ein mögliches, auf autonomen Lernformen aufbauendes, extracurriculares Sprachförderkonzept für fremdsprachige Lehramtsstudierende anhand von Unterrichtsbeispielen vorzustellen. Dabei werden insbesondere Praktiken der Förderung von Lernerautonomie und deren Umsetzbarkeit im Rahmen dieses Kurses

2014) definiert den Begriff dahingehen, dass er Ausländerinnen und Ausländer (inklusive solcher, die einen Schweizer Elternteil haben), Schweizer Staatsangehörige mit zwei im Ausland geborenen Elternteilen sowie Eingebürgerte umfasst. Der Wunsch und die Forderung, mehr Personen mit Migrationshintergrund für den Lehrerberuf zu gewinnen, stellt nicht nur in der Schweiz ein aktuelles bildungspolitisches Ziel dar. In diversen weiteren Staaten, deren Bevölkerung durch Zuwanderung in den letzten Jahrzehnten vermehrt multikulturell und mehrsprachig wurde, sind Stimmen zu hören, welche auch für die Lehrerschaft derartig kulturelle Hintergründe fordern. In Deutschland beispielsweise fördern Stiftungen und Netzwerke mit Projekten und Stipendien Lehramtsstudierende mit Migrationshintergrund (vgl. Mantel und Leutwyler 2013, S. 235 mit Literatur). Die Forderungen (und Fördermittel) werden laut Mantel und Leutwyler (ebd., S. 236) häufig durch die Ansicht gestützt, dass Verhältnis der multikulturellen Anteile bei der Schülerschaft solle auch in der Lehrerschaft vertreten sein. Dies geschehe in der Annahme, dass Lehrpersonen mit Migrationshintergrund „über besonderes Potential im Umgang mit migrationsbedingter Heterogenität verfüg[t]en“ (ebd.). Sie zeigen jedoch auf, dass diese Annahme nur marginal von bisheriger empirischer Forschung gestützt wird und mehr Forschungsbedarf besteht.

erörtert und ausgewertet. Für das Konzept der „Lernerautonomie“ orientiere ich mich an Bensons (2011, S. 59–61) Definition, die auf Holec (1981) und Little (1991) aufbaut. Benson versteht darunter die Fähigkeit des/der Lernenden, Kontrolle über das eigene Lernen, und zwar über das Lernmanagement, den -inhalt und die kognitiven Prozesse zu übernehmen. „Lernerautonomie“ ist nicht als Lehrmethode, sondern als Lern- bzw. sogar Bildungsziel anzusehen (vgl. Little 1991, S. 3, Dam 2003, S. 137), um die Lernenden für lebenslanges Lernen zu rüsten. Die Hauptaufgabe der Lehrenden besteht darin, Unterstützung, Begleitung/Beratung und Lernressourcen zu bieten (Benson 2011, S. 186 nach Voller 1997).

2. DEUTSCH ALS ZWEITSPRACHE IN DER SCHWEIZ

Vier Sprachen - Deutsch, Französisch, Italienisch und Rätoromanisch - gelten per Bundesverfassung in der Schweiz als offizielle Landessprachen und werden als Amtssprachen auf Bundesebene verwendet.² Die Schweizerische Eidgenossenschaft verfügt über ein Sprachengesetz (SpG) und eine Sprachenverordnung (SpV), welche den Gebrauch der Amtssprachen und die Förderung von Verständigung und Austausch zwischen den verschiedenen Sprachgemeinschaften regelt sowie Gewicht auf den Erhalt der nationalen Minderheitensprachen und der Viersprachigkeit legt.

Auf regionaler Ebene wird in der föderalistischen Gesetzesordnung den Kantonen (Gliederstaaten) die Kompetenz übertragen, die kantonale(n) Amtssprache(n) gemäss Territorialitätsprinzip festzule-

²Vgl. Bundesverfassung (BV) der Schweizerischen Eidgenossenschaft Art. 4, Art. 70.1. Das Rätoromanische wird allerdings nur „im Verkehr mit Personen rätoromanischer Sprache“ verwendet. Es handelt sich in der Schweiz um eine „territoriale Mehrsprachigkeit“ (vgl. Kniffka und Siebert-Ott 2012, S. 168f.). Die Landessprachen sind geographisch deutlich einzelnen Regionen zugeordnet. Der grösste Anteil der Schweizer Bevölkerung hat nur eine Erstsprache und lernt zwei weitere Sprachen (davon mindestens eine weitere Landessprache) als Fremdsprachen in der Schule. 64.9% der Bevölkerung gaben 2012 Deutsch oder Schweizerdeutsch als ihre „Hauptsprache“ an, 22.6% Französisch, 8.3% Italienisch und 0.5% Rätoromanisch. Ein Anteil von 21% spricht (zusätzlich) eine Migrationssprache als Hauptsprache, worunter Englisch (4.6%), Portugiesisch (3.4%), Albanisch (2.6%) und Serbisch/Kroatisch (2.5%) dominieren (Quelle: BFS SE 2012).

gen, d.h. unter Berücksichtigung der herkömmlichen sprachlichen Zusammensetzung ihres Gebiets inklusive „angestammte[r] sprachliche[r] Minderheiten“ (BV Art. 70.2). Die vier Landessprachen sind territorial verteilt. Es gibt keinen Schweizer Kanton, in dem alle vier Landessprachen offiziell als Amtssprachen verwendet werden. De facto sind 22 der insgesamt 26 Schweizer Kantone einsprachig,³ drei Kantone im deutsch-französischsprachigen Grenzgebiet zweisprachig⁴ und Graubünden hat offiziell drei Amtssprachen: Deutsch, Italienisch und Rätoromanisch. Für den konkreten Sprachgebrauch in der Deutschschweiz bedeutet dies beispielsweise, dass eine aus dem Tessin stammende italienischsprachige Person, die im Kanton Zürich lebt, von den örtlichen Behörden in der kantonalen Amtssprache Deutsch adressiert wird und sich auch auf Deutsch an diese zu richten hat.⁵ Personen nicht-deutscher Erstsprache sehen sich in der Deutschschweiz zudem der Schwierigkeit des funktionalen Nebeneinanders von Standarddeutsch und Dialekten gegenübergestellt („Diglossie“, Christen et al. 2010). Beide Varietäten gehören zum täglichen Sprachgebrauch, die Verwendung der jeweiligen Varietät ist situations- und adressatenbezogen: Im alltäglichen, informellen Umgang (Pausenkaffee, Supermarkt, bei einer zufälligen Begegnung) wird generell Dialekt gesprochen und zwar unabhängig von Themen. Einzig, wenn Personen anwesend sind, die keinen Dialekt verstehen, wird meist auf Standardsprache gewechselt (ebd.). Die mündliche Standardsprache wird zudem in der Schule, in der Kirche, im Gericht, für Nachrichtenformate im Fernsehen und für vorbereitete Reden und Vorträge – also in formellen Situationen – verwendet. In der Schriftlichkeit gilt vorwiegend Standarddeutsch, in den neuen Medien (E-Mail, Chat, SMS) ist allerdings vermehrt

³ Deutsch: 17 Kantone in der Zentral- und Ostschweiz; Französisch: 4 Kantone in der Westschweiz, Genf, Jura, Neuenburg, Waadt; Italienisch: Tessin in der Südschweiz.

⁴ Bern/Berne, Freiburg/Fribourg, Wallis/Valais.

⁵ Vgl. Kantonsverfassung des Kantons Zürich Art. 48. Dies gilt insbesondere bei amtlichen Verfügungen und rechtlichen Angelegenheiten. Viele Behörden und Arbeitsstellen bieten jedoch auch Informationen und Auskunft in anderen Sprachen an. In anderen Kantonen, wie beispielsweise Basel-Stadt, sind Behörden und Arbeitsstellen „befugt, auch in anderen Sprachen zu verkehren“ (Verfassung des Kantons Basel-Stadt Art. 76.2).

auch Dialekt in Gebrauch. Für Deutschschweizer ist es in der Regel völlig klar, wann Dialekt und wann Standardsprache verwendet wird. Sie können ausserdem deutlich von der einen auf die andere Varietät umschalten.

Die Schweizer Dialekte stellen regionale Varietäten des Deutschen dar und zeigen insbesondere in Phonologie und Lexik, aber auch in Morphologie und Syntax Unterschiede zur Standardsprache.⁶ Der Dialektgebrauch wird in der Schweiz nicht wie in weiten Teilen Deutschlands mit sozialer Zugehörigkeit in Verbindung gebracht und deshalb als defizitär gegenüber der Standardsprache angesehen (vgl. Ammon und Kyvelos 2004, S. XLV), sondern ist mit hohem Prestige versehen.

Diese Ausführungen machen deutlich, dass die Spracherwerbssituation für Nicht-deutschsprachige in der Deutschschweiz keine einfache ist. In bisheriger Literatur wurde die Spracherwerbssituation in der Deutschschweiz jedoch erst vorwiegend für mehrsprachige Kinder und Jugendliche beleuchtet.⁷ Spezifisch für den Deutschwerb von fremdsprachigen Erwachsenen in der Deutschschweiz gibt es nur sehr wenig Forschung (vgl. Clalüna 2010, S. 162), insbesondere nicht in Bezug auf das Nebeneinander von Dialekten und Standard (Ender 2012, S. 239).

Eine Schwierigkeit besteht darin, dass ein ungesteuerter Erwerb der Standardsprache zumindest in der Alltagsmündlichkeit meist nicht möglich ist, sondern vorwiegend in Sprachkursen gesteuert erworben werden muss. Im Unterschied zu Kindern und Jugendlichen werden Erwachsene ausserdem nicht staatlich institutionell in ihren Deutschkompetenzen gefördert und über eine längere Zeit professionell begleitet. Dies erhöht die Gefahr einer unbewusst verwendeten, oft auch fossilisierten Mischsprache von Dialekt und Sta-

⁶ Einführend zur Schweizer Sprachsituation sowie einigen lautlichen und formalen Eigenheiten der Schweizer Dialekte vgl. Christen et al. (2013, S. 23–34), im Detail zu den Unterschieden Standarddeutsch – Dialekt(e) vgl. Sonderegger (2003, S. 2837–2840, 2870–2876).

⁷ Vgl. z.B. Schlatter et al. 2011, S. 14, ausführlicher dazu vgl. Waldispühl, in Bearbeitung.

ndard. Der Dialektgebrauch im Alltag kann zudem überfordern und gar Auswirkungen auf die Lernmotivation haben (vgl. Feuz 2001).

An Deutschschweizer Hochschulen ist eine politisch verankerte Sprachförderung von erwachsenen Studierenden mit Deutsch als Zweitsprache während des Studiums nicht die Regel. Generell braucht es Sprachkenntnisse auf C1-Niveau (gemäß Gesamteuropäischem Referenzrahmen), um überhaupt zum Studium zugelassen zu werden. Es gibt Kursangebote für Deutsch als Fremdsprache, die jedoch auf Freiwilligkeit und Initiative der Lernenden basieren.⁸ An der Pädagogischen Hochschule in Zug ist die Sprachförderung Studierender mit Deutsch als Zweitsprache im Sprachenkonzept integriert und soll im Folgenden vorgestellt werden.

3. AUSBILDUNG ZUR PRIMARLEHRPERSON AN DER PH ZUG⁹

Das Lehramtsstudium für die Grundschule (1.–9. Klasse) wird in der Schweiz an Pädagogischen Hochschulen (Fachhochschulen) absolviert. Für die Vor- und Primarschule durchlaufen Studierende einen Bachelorstudiengang von drei Jahren, für die Sekundarschule einen Masterstudiengang.

An der Pädagogischen Hochschule Zug werden die Bachelorstudiengänge Kindergarten/Unterstufe und Primarstufe angeboten. Das Studium ist durch einen kompakten Ausbildungsplan stark strukturiert und gliedert sich in vier Hauptstudienbereiche: 1) Fachausbildung und Fachdidaktik in insgesamt acht Fächern, wovon die Fächer Deutsch, Mathematik, Mensch und Umwelt (Naturwissenschaften), eine Fremdsprache (Englisch oder Französisch) Pflicht

⁸ Vgl. z.B. die Universität Zürich, an welcher Studienbewerberinnen und -bewerber nicht-deutscher Erstsprache entweder ein anerkanntes Sprachdiplom auf mindestens C1-Niveau vorweisen oder vor Studienantritt eine Deutschprüfung ablegen müssen (www.uzh.ch, 14.4.2014). Das Sprachenzentrum der Universität und der ETH Zürich bietet Kurse für Deutsch als Fremdsprache an, die sich mehrheitlich an Mobilitätsstudierende richten (Niveaus A1–B2). Allerdings gibt es auch ein paar studienbegleitende Kurse auf C1-Niveau z.B. zum wissenschaftlichen Schreiben, fachbezogenem Deutsch für Wirtschaft und Recht und zum Schweizerdeutschen (www.sprachenzentrum.uzh.ch, 21.7.2014).

⁹ Vgl. www.phzg.ch (29.4.2014).

sind. 2) Berufspraxis und Berufswissen, worunter die Unterrichtspraxis mit Praktika und begleitenden Mentoraten zu verstehen ist. 3) Bildungs- und Sozialwissenschaften (Pädagogik, Soziologie, Psychologie, allgemeine Didaktik). 4) Fächerübergreifendes und wissenschaftsorientiertes Arbeiten.

Bezüglich Sprachkompetenzen wird in den Studienanforderungen zwischen Fremdsprachen und der Schulsprache Deutsch unterschieden. Für das Studium der Fremdsprachen Englisch und Französisch muss bei Studieneintritt das Niveau B2 vorliegen und vor Studienabschluss das Niveau C1 erreicht werden, was die Studierenden anhand eines Zertifikats nachweisen müssen. Für die Schulsprache Deutsch ist im Allgemeinen das Niveau der Gymnasialstufe Voraussetzung, dennoch werden die Deutschkompetenzen zu Studienbeginn mit einer obligatorischen, zweistündigen, schriftlichen Prüfung erhoben. Der Test besteht aus zwei Teilen, einem auf sprachliche Normen und deklaratives Sprachwissen ausgerichteten ersten Teil und einem Schreibauftrag, bei dem die Studierenden einen Elternbrief verfassen. Im zweiten Teil werden neben sprachsystematischen Kriterien auch textstrukturelle Aspekte wie Kohärenz und angemessene Ausführung der Aufgabenstellung sowie inhaltliche wie beispielsweise passender Wortschatz beurteilt.

Bei Nicht-Bestehen eines oder auch beider Teile der Deutschprüfung sind die Studierenden während des ersten Studienjahres verpflichtet, Förderkurse („Fachateliers“) zu besuchen und nach einem Jahr die Prüfung zu wiederholen. Es gibt drei verschiedene Fachateliers: Für Rechtschreibung und Grammatik, für Texteschreiben und für Deutsch als Zweitsprache (DaZ). Die extracurricularen Kurse finden an Randstunden während insgesamt zehn Präsenzstunden pro Semester statt.

Studierende mit spezifischen Deutsch als Zweitsprache-Fehlern werden dem „Fachatelier Deutsch als Zweitsprache (DaZ)“ zugeteilt. Für Studierende im ersten Semester, welche die Sprachprüfung nicht bestanden haben, ist die Teilnahme obligatorisch. Studierende mit mehrsprachigem Hintergrund des zweiten und dritten Studienjahres können freiwillig teilnehmen.

4. „FACHATELIER DEUTSCH ALS ZWEITSPRACHE (DAZ)“

4.1 Konzeptgrundlage: Sprachliche Anforderungen an nicht-deutschsprachige Lehramtsstudierende

Das Fachatelier DaZ ist ein zweisemestriges Fördermodul, welches gezielt auf die sprachlichen Herausforderungen von Lehramtsstudierenden mit Deutsch als Zweitsprache eingeht. Es wäre ein Projekt für sich, die Sprachkompetenzen für Lehramtsstudierende mit Deutsch als Zweitsprache in einem Modell zusammenzustellen. Ein Rahmencurriculum, welches sich auf ein solches Modell stützt und zudem auf die Sprachsituation in der Deutschschweiz ausgerichtet ist, existiert bisweilen nicht. Es stellt sicherlich ein Desiderat dar, die Zweitsprachkompetenzen ganzheitlich und sowohl auf die Anforderungen im Studium wie auch im Lehrerberuf im Deutschschweizer Umfeld zu erörtern, um eine fundierte Grundlage für eine gezielte Sprachförderung dieser Zielgruppe zu garantieren (vgl. Waldispühl, in Bearbeitung).

Die Planung des Förderkurses „Fachatelier DaZ“ an der Pädagogischen Hochschule Zug orientierte sich pragmatisch einerseits an den Unterlagen des Europäischen Sprachenportfolios für den Hochschulbereich (vgl. Europäischer Sprachenrat 2003) und andererseits an individuellen Bedürfnissen der Studierenden in Studium und Beruf. Hierbei waren insbesondere Kommunikationskompetenzen in Bezug auf eigene Sprachfehler, Unsicherheiten und die Diglossiesituation relevant. Als Grundlage für die individuelle Förderung dienten zudem Rückmeldungen von Dozierenden, Praxiscoaches und Mitstudierenden aus unterschiedlichen Lernsituationen an der Hochschule (beim Verfassen von schriftlichen Texten, mündlichen Beiträgen in Modulen und insbesondere beim Unterrichten in Praktika).

Den Überlegungen Holmens (2010, S. 10) folgend wurde darauf geachtet, dass die Kursinhalte weniger im Sinne eines „teaching-to-the-test“ auf die Anforderungen der abschliessenden Sprachprüfung ausgerichtet, sondern direkt auf die studiums- und berufsorientierte Anwendung zielen. Als Richtlinie galten zudem die von der

Pädagogischen Hochschule Zug definierten personalen und sozialen Anforderungen an eine auszubildende Lehrperson. Bezogen auf die Sprache sind dies: „spricht eine korrekte, gepflegte Sprache, artikuliert verständlich und moduliert die Stimme, drückt sich präzise und flüssig aus, schreibt verständlich und stilsicher, verwendet situationsangepasste Stilformen, schreibt orthografisch weitgehend fehlerfrei“ (vgl. PH Zug 2013, S. 19).

Im Weiteren ist der Kurs stark auf autonomes Lernen ausgerichtet. Es wurde darauf geachtet, den Studierenden Möglichkeiten zu bieten, Verantwortung für ihr eigenes Lernen (zu) übernehmen (zu lernen) und das eigene Lernen zu kontrollieren. Das Hauptziel des Kurses ist es, eine Grundlage für weiterführendes Lernen – auch im späteren (Unterrichts-)Alltag – zu legen beziehungsweise zu festigen.

4.2 Kurskonzept und Unterrichtsbeispiele aus dem Jahr 2012/2013

Im Jahr 2012/2013 haben fünf Studierende am Modul teilgenommen, wovon zwei zur Teilnahme verpflichtet waren und die Sprachprüfung am Ende des Jahres wiederholen mussten. Drei Studierende mit DaZ-Hintergrund kamen freiwillig.

Der Kurs besteht aus einem Anteil von 10 Lektionen Präsenzzeit pro Semester und einer individuell gestalteten Selbstlernzeit. Im Jahr 2012/2013 lag das Hauptgewicht in der Präsenzzeit zum einen auf Strategien des sprachlichen Handelns und des individuellen Lernens und zum andern auf Einzelcoachings, welche die von den Studierenden autonom durchgeführte Selbstlernzeit strukturiert begleiteten.

Bezüglich der Strategien des sprachlichen Handelns wurde im Jahr 2012/2013 das Schwergewicht auf Strategien der Mündlichkeit (monologisches Sprechen: Präsentationen halten, dialogisches Sprechen: Bewerbungs- und Prüfungsgespräche führen) und des Texteschreibens (Texte planen und strukturieren) gelegt. Es kamen sowohl Vorschläge der Dozentin als auch spezifische Anliegen von Studierenden zum Zug. Ein Studierendenwunsch betraf aus aktuellem Anlass Verhaltensregeln und Strategien (etwa bei Verständnisschwierigkeiten) in Prüfungs- und Bewerbungsgesprächen. In einer

ersten Sequenz wurden im gemeinsamen Gespräch Möglichkeiten diskutiert, wie man sich auf ein Prüfungs- respektive Vorstellungsgespräch vorbereitet, welche Redemittel von Bedeutung sind und wie man sich bei Verständnisschwierigkeiten verhalten kann. Als Orientierung für die Gesprächsanforderungen dienten die Bewertungskriterien für das Goethe-Zertifikat C2 (Fromme und Guess 2012, S. 97), es flossen jedoch auch Erfahrungswerte der Studierenden wie auch der Dozentin mit ein. In den kommenden beiden Sequenzen simulierte die Dozentin mit einzelnen Studierenden Prüfungs- und Bewerbungsgespräche, wobei die anderen Kursteilnehmenden sich während des Gesprächs zu den besprochenen Bewertungskriterien Notizen machten. Anschliessend kamen beobachtete Aspekte in einem Metagespräch mit der gesamten Gruppe zur Sprache („Fish-pool - Methode“). In einer abschliessenden vierten Sequenz wurden die Erfahrungen zur sprachlichen Handlungsstrategie „Gespräche führen“ reflektiert und gemeinsam ausgewertet. Da in der Zwischenzeit einige Prüfungs- und Vorstellungsgespräche „in real life“ mit Erfolg durchgeführt worden waren, konnte zudem das vorbereitende Unterrichtsetting hinsichtlich seiner Effektivität evaluiert und positiv bewertet werden.

Bei den im Kursplan vorgesehenen, kurzen Unterrichtseinheiten zu autonomen Lernstrategien wurden im Gruppengespräch persönliche Arbeitsweisen beispielsweise für die individuelle Dokumentation von Gelerntem oder für Prüfungsvorbereitungen diskutiert und immer wieder Möglichkeiten besprochen, wie die eigenen Sprachfähigkeiten selbständig verbessert werden könnten. Als Unterstützung stand es den Studierenden auf freiwilliger Basis offen, auf der gemeinsamen elektronischen Lernplattform moodle ihre Erfahrungen wie auch gutes Übungsmaterial in einem Forum zu „posten“.

Für die Präsenzzeit hatten die Studierenden die Option, „Inputs“ bei der Dozentin zu Grammatik-, Rechtschreib- oder interkulturellen Themen anzufordern. Es wurde ein Input zum Thema „Nähe und Distanz in der Schweiz“ gewünscht, was Anlass gab, kulturelle Eigenheiten der Deutschschweizer und angemessene Verhaltensweisen beispielsweise zur Begrüssung bei formellen Anlässen zu diskutieren.

Schliesslich nahm das individuelle Coaching, welches in engem Zusammenhang zur Selbstlernzeit stand, einen grossen Teil der Präsenzzeit in Anspruch. Im Coaching wurden die Studierenden für ihre Selbstlernerheiten strukturiert begleitet. Weber et al. (2007, S. 160–163) folgend geht es beim Sprachcoaching darum, den Lernenden beratende Unterstützung für den eigenen, selbständigen Lernweg zu geben, indem sowohl mögliche Lerninhalte gemäss individuellem Bedarf gemeinsam ausgewählt und Möglichkeiten bestimmt werden, die Lernziele zu erreichen. Ausserdem können im Gespräch Probleme im Lernprozess sowie Lösungsansätze diskutiert werden. Für jede Studentin standen im Semester fünf Einheiten à je 10 Minuten zur Verfügung. Als Basis für das erste Coaching dienten eine informelle Sprachstandserhebung durch die Dozentin, die Selbsteinschätzung der Studierenden mit Hilfe des Europäischen Sprachenportfolios für den Hochschulbereich Niveau C2 (Europäischer Sprachenrat 2003) und individuelle Rückmeldungen von anderen Dozierenden, Praxiscoaches oder Mitstudierenden. Darauf aufbauend wurden individuelle Lernziele für die Selbstlernzeit und Massnahmen festgelegt, diese zu erreichen. Die Studierenden hielten die Lernziele und Massnahmen schriftlich fest und reichten sie nach dem Coaching bei der Dozentin ein. In den folgenden Sitzungen wurden die persönlichen Fortschritte bei den einzelnen Lernzielen diskutiert und aus dem Lernstand neue Lernziele und Massnahmen abgeleitet und definiert. Den Studierenden stand es zudem frei, schriftliche Texte einzureichen, anhand deren die Dozentin erneut eine Sprachstandserhebung durchführte. Den Lernprozess dokumentierten die Studierenden individuell.

5. AUTONOMES LERNEN ALS VORAUSSETZUNG UND ZIEL

Im „Fachatelier DaZ“ wurde von den Hochschulstudierenden ein hoher Grad an Lernerautonomie gefordert und vorausgesetzt. Es kamen jedoch auch gezielt autonome Lerntechniken zur Sprache und wurden begleitet gefördert.

Die grössten Anforderungen an autonomes Arbeiten stellte sicherlich die Selbstlernzeit. Die Studierenden waren nicht nur im

hohen Mass daran beteiligt, die Lerninhalte und -materialien zu bestimmen, sondern auch die eigene Lernzeit zu strukturieren, Lernorte zu definieren, eigene Lernstrategien anzuwenden, ihren Lernprozess zu überwachen wie auch in der Gruppe und mit der Dozentin Lernstrategien zu diskutieren. Die Methoden des autonomen Lernens wurden im Kurs einerseits im lernbegleitenden Coaching alle drei bis vier Wochen und andererseits in der Präsenzzeit in der Gruppe (Diskussion Lernstrategien) thematisiert und weiterentwickelt. Die Studierenden leisteten in den Diskussionen selber diverse Beiträge an die Sammlung von autonom orientierten Lern- und Arbeitsweisen.

Dadurch, dass das Kursprogramm nur in Grundzügen von der Dozentin vorgegeben wurde, bekamen die Studierenden einen hohen Grad an Mitbestimmung, um auch die Präsenzzeit für ihr eigenes Lernen zu nutzen. Der von der Dozentin erarbeitete Kursplan wurde vor Kursbeginn verschickt und kam in der ersten Semesterstunde zur Diskussion. Die Studierenden wurden gebeten, ihre Wünsche und Korrekturen anzubringen. Das Angebot zur Mitbestimmung wurde von den Studierenden allerdings nur einmal aus eigener Initiative genutzt wurde (Wunsch des interkulturellen Inputs, vgl. oben). Weitere Wünsche, wie die oben beschriebene Ausrichtung auf Prüfungs- und Bewerbungsgespräche, äusserten die Studierenden nur auf Anlass wiederholten Nachfragens der Dozentin in den jeweiligen Präsenzzeiten.

Das Online-Forum blieb bis auf einzelne wenige Einträge inaktiv. Um die Nutzung der E-learning-Plattform lerneffizienter zu gestalten, müsste sie mit klar auf das Studienziel ausgerichteten Aufträgen enger an die Unterrichtsabläufe, z.B. Diskussionen in der Präsenzzeit, gebunden werden.

Die Studierenden wurden am Ende des Studienjahres in einem Gruppeninterview zu ihren Erfahrungen und Meinungen zu den im Kurs angewandten autonomen Lernformen befragt. Bezüglich der Selbstlernzeit äusserten sie, dass die regelmässige Begleitung (Coaching) ein wichtiger Faktor zur Strukturierung des eigenen Lernens gewesen wäre. Die individuellen Treffen mit der Dozentin hätten zum persönlichen Lernen angetrieben und wichtige

Verbindlichkeit geschaffen. Wie die Selbstlernzeit bewältigt wurde, unterschied sich zwischen den einzelnen Studierenden. Einige haben mehr Zeit und Energie investiert, andere weniger. Sie wünschten für eine weitere Durchführung mehr Lenkung und eine engere Führung seitens der Dozentin, insbesondere bei der Evaluation der Lernziele. Es wurde der Vorschlag einer Übersichtstabelle diskutiert, bei der die Studierenden die Lernziele und die Massnahmen, diese zu erreichen, wie auch die erledigten Arbeiten festhalten. Die Dozentin wäre so in der Lage, anhand der Tabelle den Lernprozess nachzuvollziehen und auf Wunsch von Studierenden zu kontrollieren. Diese explizite Forderung basiere laut Aussage der Studierenden nur teilweise auf mangelnder Erfahrung oder Unsicherheit mit der autonomen Lernform, sondern sei im Licht der Studienanforderungen insgesamt zu sehen: Sie wollen durch die Kontrolle der Dozentin für sich selber mehr Verbindlichkeit schaffen, damit sie sich neben allen weiteren Studienanforderungen auch tatsächlich Zeit für extracurriculäres individuelles Lernen schaffen „müssen“.

Die Studierenden zeigten nach einem Jahr sprachliche Fortschritte, wobei sich allerdings nicht überprüfen lässt, inwiefern diese auf das Kurskonzept zurückzuführen sind, da die Kontrollgruppe fehlt. Jedenfalls konnte bei allen gemäss Eigen- und Fremdeinschätzung anhand der oben genannten Kriterienraster festgestellt werden, dass sich die Sicherheit im sprachlichen Umgang bei Präsentationen, Bewerbungs- und Prüfungsgesprächen wie auch der Planung eines schriftlichen Texts deutlich gesteigert hat. Der gegenseitige Austausch zu den Lernstrategien und den Strategien des sprachlichen Handelns wurde von den Studierenden geschätzt. Das auf Strategien des sprachlichen Handelns ausgerichtete Kurskonzept hat sich somit bewährt. Mit den Strategien wurde selbst eine Grundlage geschaffen, die erworbenen Kompetenzen auf weitere sprachliche Handlungssituationen zu übertragen.

Durch die geringe Teilnehmerzahl von fünf Studierenden konnte das Kurskonzept gut auf individuelle Bedürfnisse ausgerichtet werden. Gemäss Aussage der Studierenden habe die offene Gestaltung des Kursprogramms wie auch die Möglichkeiten der Mitbestimmung eine animierende Grundlage für das eigene Lernen

geschaffen. Neben der geringen Teilnehmerzahl zählte sicherlich auch die in der unmittelbaren Anwendung der Sprache in Beruf und Studium begründete Motivation der Studierenden zu den Gelingensfaktoren.

6. SCHLUSSBEMERKUNGEN

Der Förderkurs „Fachatelier Deutsch als Zweitsprache (DaZ)“ ist gezielt auf die Sprachförderung mehrsprachiger Lehramtsstudierender ausgerichtet. Die Kursinhalte orientieren sich weniger an den sprachformalen Defiziten der Fremdsprachigen als vielmehr an Strategien, die für das sprachliche Handeln im schulischen und hochschulstudentischen Umfeld und das autonome Lernen benötigt werden. Die Studierenden haben gemäss Angaben in der mündlich durchgeführten Kursevaluation das auf autonomes Lernen ausgerichtete Kurskonzept als grundsätzlich lernanimierend, jedoch auch herausfordernd erachtet.

Im Rahmen des vorliegenden Beitrags wurde die Frage nach den erforderlichen Sprachkompetenzen von Lehrpersonen mit mehrsprachigem Hintergrund in der Deutschschweiz nur angeschnitten. Das Konzept für den Förderkurs basiert nicht auf empirischer Forschung, sondern auf dem unmittelbaren Bedarf der Studierenden, der sich individuell unterschiedet und im Verlaufe des Studienjahres veränderte. Um die Sprachförderung zu optimieren, wäre eine systematische Bedarfsanalyse wünschenswert, welche zugleich auch Basis für eine Rahmenordnung für sprachliche Schwierigkeiten und Herausforderungen von Lehramtsstudierenden mit Deutsch als Zweitsprache darstellen könnte. Eine solche Bedarfsanalyse sollte unbedingt auf die Studien- und zukünftigen Berufssituationen ausgerichtet sein und zugleich mögliche Förderansätze und -massnahmen ausloten und aufzeigen. Wie genau dies geschehen soll, bleibt noch zu klären (vgl. Waldispühl, in Bearbeitung).

Abschliessend sei angemerkt, dass es zu den Anforderungen des Lehrerberufs gehört, den Kindern auch sprachliches Vorbild zu sein. Oft werden dabei unter „Sprache“ die Normen wie Grammatik und Rechtschreibung verstanden: eine Lehrperson darf keine

Kommafehler machen, sie darf auch keine falschen Kasusformen anwenden. Sprache und insbesondere sprachliches Handeln ist aber viel mehr als Rechtschreibung und Grammatik. Lehrpersonen mit Deutsch als Zweitsprache haben es schwieriger, den sprachlichen Normen zu genügen, weil die sprachliche Intuition für beispielsweise das grammatische Geschlecht von Substantiven oder Adjektivendungen nicht im gleichen Mass entwickelt ist wie bei Deutschsprachigen. Sie können aber sprachliche Vorbilder sein, wenn es um den Umgang mit Fehlern, um Strategien des Sprachenlernens und -handelns – wozu auch Überarbeitungs- und Korrekturstrategien sowie Strategien des autonomen Sprachenlernens gehören – und um das Sprachenbewusstsein für das Deutsche geht. Durch ihre Bereitschaft, auch im Lehrerberuf selbstinitiiert immer weiter an ihren Sprachfähigkeiten zu arbeiten, und indem sie Fehler oder Unsicherheiten nicht zu vermeiden oder zu vertuschen versuchen, sondern diese – gegebenenfalls mit Hilfe der Kinder – angehen und zur Diskussion stellen, tragen sie dazu bei, im Klassenzimmer einen konstruktiven Umgang mit sprachlichen Lernsituationen zu schaffen. So geben sie dahingehend eine wichtige Vorbildfunktion nicht nur für mehrsprachige Kinder, sondern auch für deutschsprachige. Nicht zuletzt brauchen sie dafür die Fähigkeit autonom zu lernen, wie auch Erfahrung und Metawissen zu diesen Lernformen, was während des Studiums nicht genug thematisiert werden kann.

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Learner Autonomy is a very important issue in education. In fulfilling different teaching responsibilities, teachers make decisions about the goals of learning. The challenge today is to promote a learner autonomy movement. This means that learners should take responsibly for their own learning and organize their learning activity. The learners should have the opportunity to practice and develop their autonomy for learning new information, a process which thus changes the teachers' role in significant and challenging ways. This publication is the result of research which includes useful information of practical experience in fostering learner autonomy in Higher Education. It is the hope of all the authors herein that their papers will be inspiring for educators, and will assist them in the task which remains for all of us: implementing innovation in the classroom.

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