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Autonomy as Determinant of Prospective Learning: A Study of English Language Learners

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Abstract

Autonomy plays a crucial role in the enhancement of important learning qualities in the learners. In that line of thinking, this study was launched to discover how English language learners exposed to an autonomously managed versus teacher controlled conditions would respond to the learning determinants. Two classes of English language learners at Isfahan University of Technology, Iran were thus treated under the two learning conditions. On the closing days of the semester, they were administered a questionnaire constructed based on three action phases of learning, namely, forethought, performance/volitional control, and self reflection. The questionnaire statements were rated on the Likert scale. The data analysis revealed that autonomy to a large extent determines the learners' views of learning. The class where autonomy was practiced showed a great deal of motivational boost or what is reinterpreted as forethought. The other two categories of learning, namely, their performance and self reflection, were also distinctly better perceived by the autonomous learners. The results point out the significance of preparing learners through autonomy for the prospective independent and critical learning.

Keywords: Autonomy; English language; Learning perception; Motivation; Performance; Self Reflection.

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1. Introduction

The idea of learner passivity and teacher authority as a long entrenched inclination in the context of foreign language learning was dispelled in the face of the communicative competence era focusing on the learning process, language functions, and language use (Savignon, 1997). This new trend heralded a shift towards learner centeredness, which as noted by Nunan (1988) and Breen and Candlin (1980) required learners to participate and negotiate in meaningful interactions and construct meaning on their own. The learner centered approach placed much premium on the advisory role of the teachers to be coupled with the learners' active involvement in setting the goals, planning, implementing and evaluating their own priorities of learning. In this way, the teachers devolved their authorities on to the learners by gearing the instructional materials, methods and techniques, and study options to the learners' learning styles and perceived or felt needs. In other words, teachers placed more of the responsibilities in the hands of learners to manage their own learning, and they themselves served as fostering learner autonomy (Banks, 2002; Lin, 2002). One important point in regard to this restructuring of responsibility and power in the classroom is to see how the new conditions associated with autonomy of learners bear fruit in the learners' perception of learning, especially lifelong learning. This investigation is thus an attempt to shed some light on our understanding of the manner in which various dimensions of learning are perceived as regards the contrived adversarial bipolarity of autonomy versus no autonomy exercised in the classroom.

What is Autonomy?

The theoretical literature reveals the consensus that autonomy is the offshoot of the learner's efforts to accept and grasp self directed learning and responsibility (Dickinson, 1995). This control of learning, according to Benson (2001), takes on different forms for different individuals depending on the conditions, settings and times, and may dynamically shift toward or away from a strict definition of the term.

Autonomy of learners and how it is related to learning has been a perennial and concomitant part of the perceptions around this buzz word. Due to the elusive nature of autonomy, it has been differently defined and interpreted. Little (1991), talking of

autonomous learners, regard them as 'having capacity for detachment, critical reflection, decision making and independent action" (P.4). Holec (1981) describes it as learner's ability to assume responsibility for his own learning. Candy (1991) argues that autonomy is a dynamic process requiring some kind of educational interventions. Holmes and Ramos (1991) think that autonomy has to engender learners' awareness and identification of their potentials to strategically deal with their learning. Little (2003) expands the term to include learners' insight, positive attitude, a capacity for reflection and preparedness for self management. Further out, Dickinson (1995) considers autonomy as the ability to determine one's level of knowledge and skills or self assessment. Tumposky (1982) views autonomy as individualistic, being contingent on the individual's level of learning habits, interests, needs, and motivation.

From this variety of opinions, we can gather that in redistributing and transferring the power structure of the traditional classrooms the scholars are moving towards an almost fully authorized learner with the teacher's role and control being almost totally abdicated. Commenting on this unilateral orientation, Thansoulas (2000) says that autonomy should not be equated with unbridled learning and a context with no teacher to manage and monitor the process and adapt the resources to the learners' needs. To bridge this theoretical gap, some scholars (Little, 2000; Aoki, 2000; Benson, 2000) have brought forth the notion of teacher autonomy as a supplementary dimension. They believe that a teacher has to first have an affective and cognitive control of teaching process or self directed professional action. Second, a teacher has to be aware of why, when, where, and how pedagogical skills can be developed (self directed professional development). Third, a teacher needs to be free from control of others in a working condition. It seems that teachers are expected to exercise these three dimensions of autonomy in the face of autonomous conditions of learning provided for the learners. Mariana (1997) portrays autonomy over a continuum of dependence/ independence, with self regulation at one end counterbalanced by security and safety at the other. She links autonomy and dependence to two parallel notions of challenge and support. That is, the teacher poses challenge to the learners so as to

promote and enhance autonomy and at the same time give them confidence and trust by presenting himself as a supporting hand. In this line of thinking, Crome, Farrar, and O'Connor (2009) combine the two dimensions of autonomy as first constituting learning that learners wish to do for themselves and second as involving teacher's role in guiding learners how to do something with the intention of replicating comparable activities later independently.

Though this dichotomy appears to present an ideal picture of responsibility sharing between learners and teachers, we need to note that both teachers and learners tend not to shun away from their long established hierarchical relationship. Learners probably continue to be pleased with the unsolicited conditions of dependent learning and teachers may attempt to remain responsible and thus accountable for any kind of success or failure, especially if the measure of achievement is to be determined through the end of the year failure rate. Moreover, some teachers are not yet well prepared to take over their authority and full control (Sheerin, 1997). Regardless of the dilemmas and controversies around the teachers and learners' roles and also what it means to be autonomous in a classroom, there seems to be unanimous agreement that autonomy provides a rich and promising condition of learning for learners and is in accord with the new constructivist theories which could lead to long life learning as a more plausible goal of education. Next section is thus intended to show how autonomy can be theoretically linked to and affect learning.

Autonomy and Learning

Autonomy is not a credendum or a product to be consumed or a special personal quality or trait (Thanasoulas, 2000). But, it refers to the provision of certain conditions such as cognitive or metacognitive awareness raising or motivational level boosting for fostering independent planning and responsibility for learning. These conditions launch learners into self-access and by promoting strategic behaviors help them to stay afloated (Sheerin, 1997). Autonomy and active participation in class decisions is presumed to be an element of relevant learning concepts (Hudley, Graham & Taylor, 2007) whereby instruction in the classroom can take advantage of reinforcing learners' perceptions of motivational beliefs and self

regulation as an initiation for further practical development of skills in learning (Luftenegger, Schober, van de Schoot, Wagner, Finsterwald & Spiel 2012). In most theories and models of learning, especially under a lifespan vista, autonomy is accorded importance as it is considered an underlying anchorage, which can, if properly provided, lead to the development of certain psychological parameters determining learning for individuals (Luftenegger et al. 2012). Irrespective of learning settings, relevant literature review demonstrates two important components of psychological variables arising from autonomous conditions supplied in the classroom (Artlet et al., 2003). The first one involves 'will to learn', otherwise described as development of motivation for learning and education and the second component is 'skills to learn' or successful translation of motivation into concrete activities. Accordingly, learners can meet the demands of their learning if autonomous and self regulated conditions are made available and exercised well to flourish the dichotomous perceptions of learning. In other words, autonomy is strongly linked with the manner in which learners can develop their own perceptual and insightful experiences of how motivational beliefs are created and the way they culminate in management and practice of learning.

This part of the description seeks to show the two above reviewed parts of learning (will and skills to learn to be determined by autonomy) and how they fit into the framework where the base is autonomy. Following and probing into the relevant literature, it is discovered that cyclical process models on motivation and learning (Zimmerman, 2000; Schmitz & Wiese, 2006) divide learning actions and their causal factors into three phases. The first phase is known as 'forethought', which revolves around initiation and planning of a learning action. The second phase narrows down learning actions into 'performance/ volitional control' and finally the third one is self-regulation or the functional evaluation of the previous learning actions. In reference to the above dichotomy of learning, the first phase of actions actually represents 'will to learn' and the last two phases 'skills to learn'. In this study, drawing on Luftenegger et al. (2012), the theoretical basis of the study is borrowed and adapted from Zimmerman (2000), focusing on the extent to which the autonomous versus non autonomous

conditions of the classroom can determine the learners' development of the described framework of learning.

Moreover, the three learning phases are subdivided into the following sub-dimensions. As claimed by Zimmerman, the first phase or forethought subsumes motivational variables consisting of 'interest' in the subject matter (Krapp, 2002), which is in turn broken down into 'value' component indicating the personal significance and intrinsic pleasure associated with the subject and 'expectancy' as another component pointing to the fact that learners can achieve their goals better if they feel so. This phase or forethought also involves goal orientation as a driving motivational force. This category consists of two subcomponents, namely, comprehension of the content and growth in abilities and competencies. The third category belonging to the forethought phase relates to self efficacy subdivided into confidence in being effective and striving to organize efforts for achievement. Bandura (1997) describes self efficacy as the belief in one's own abilities to arrange and implement the courses of action needed to fulfill the goals. Luftenegger et al. (2012) explain that self efficacy can influence the selection of tasks to be followed, and the level of perseverance to be directed in the execution of the tasks. The above reviewed components and subcomponents all make up the first phase of learning referred to as forethought phase or more specifically 'motivational beliefs, thought to be affected and variably determined by autonomy.

The second phase or 'performance/ volitional control' suggested by Zimmerman (2000) distinguishes between monitoring of the learning and application of strategies. The third phase is self reflection including two components of assessment of learning and also criticism of the learning actions. Luftenegger et al. (2012) believe that this third phase makes the learning action come full circle. The framework encompassing the learning categories can be clearly observed in the following table.

Table 1. Learning and its Components as Defined in this Paper

Learning Categories		
1. Forethought (Motivational Beliefs)	A. Interest	1. Value
		2. Expectancy
	B. Goal Orientation	1. Content Goals
		2. Competencies
	C. Self Efficacy	1. Confidence
		2. Achievement Organization
2. Performance	Monitoring one's Activities	
	Application of Strategies	
3. Self Reflection	Assessment of Achievement	
	Criticism of Activities	

In this study, we first supply some polarized conditions of independent versus dependent learning in two initially homogenized classes studying English as one of their university courses and then on the closing days of the term investigate their perception of learning and how it comes under the influence of the assigned circumstances. In other words, this study intends to cast light over how autonomy can affect and determine the learners' views of learning. To this end, as reviewed above, some concrete variables, as discovered in the literature, determining the two central components of learning (will to learn and skills to learn) are investigated. As the constituent variables of the first phase of learning (forethought representing will to learn) the study focuses on motivational beliefs (interest, goal orientation and self efficacy), with each one comprising certain dimensions as presented above. The constituent variables of the second phase (performance/volitional control), and the third phase (self reflection) both representing skills to learn are also investigated. Moreover, the degree of the relationship between these different dimensions and sub dimensions are also explored.

Method

Design and Participants

A researcher constructed questionnaire based on the definition of learning as explained above was administered to the two groups of students, with the autonomously managed group (A) comprising 32 and teacher controlled group (B) consisting of 27, both males and females with the age range of 16 to 25. The language learners in group A were first provided with the chance to take charge of their own learning while learners in group B were predominantly controlled and

monitored under teacher's strict instruction. The participants in both groups were university students of engineering taking English as a required General Course in 2010-2011, at Isfahan university of Technology, Isfahan, Iran. The students were placed in these two classes depending on their performance on the English test of the university entrance exam, indicating that they enjoyed roughly similar status (all of them had achieved 60 percent plus on the English language test-Konkoor). However, there was no further need to take care of their initial state as they were supposed to just answer the questionnaire assessing their perceptions only. To cast light on the design more, it must be pointed out the autonomous condition versus teacher controlled one served as independent and the designated learning components as dependent variables.

Questionnaire

The questionnaire was constructed based on the model of learning reviewed above. All the components of learning were included and randomly spread in the questionnaire. Items in the questionnaire contained a 5-point Likert scale of self-estimation of the learning; each defining component for learning was represented through two items totaling 20. The questionnaire was prepared and administered in Farsi, the learners' first language, to avoid any misunderstanding.

In order to improve the quality of the questionnaire and the precise measurement it is supposed to provide, the constructed items of the questionnaire were first revised after a week by the two researchers and then finalized by another colleague for the transparency and intelligibility. The constructed questionnaire was further given to ten experts, all specialists in different disciplines of language teaching, testing, and education, to judge on the content validity of the questions on a 10 degree scale of appropriacy. All in all, the experts' mean score for the questions was about 9.2, signifying the content validity of about 92%. Also, referring to the experts' comments, the necessary modifications and adjustments for the clarity of the instruction, and the intelligibility were then implemented.

Additionally, the construct validity of the questionnaire was established through factor analysis. The three main factors underlying the hypothetical model represented by 10 minor subcategories (See

Table 1), already rated on 5 point Likert scale ranging from absolutely disagree (1) to absolutely disagree (5) by a sample of 154 respondents were analyzed using SPSS 16, for the descriptive statistics, correlation matrix, KMO measure of sampling adequacy, Bartlett's test of sphericity, rotated component matrix and factor loadings. These measures are presented below to cast light over the suitability of instrument used in this study.

First, the analysis of descriptive statistics revealed that the obtained means vary from 3.99 to 4.32 for major categories and 'Performance' has the highest mean, indicating that it is the most important variable affecting the respondents' view of learning.

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics (Major Categories)

Major Categories	Mean	Standard Deviation	Analysis No.
Motivational beliefs	3.99	1.06	154
Performance	4.32	1.04	154
Self reflection	4.13	1.35	154

The correlation coefficient matrix further showed that the variables and their representative items are closely associated together, with the determinant index of 1.87 signifying the acceptability of the model used. To substantiate the strength of the relationship between variables and also the adequacy of sampling, the two measures of KMO and Bartlett's test were computed and the result for the next step, factor analysis, proved quite satisfactory.

Table 3. KMO and Bartlett's Test

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure	.617
Bartlett's test of Sphericity	
Approx. Chi-Square:	49.675
df	153
Sig:	0.0012

And finally, factor analysis using extraction method of Principal Component Analysis and also Varimax Rotation showed that 8 factors enjoyed Engenvalues higher than 1 (ranging from 1.02 to 4.7), accounting for 87.8 of total variance. Therefore, the Varimax Rotation demonstrated that the 8 determining factors form high to low (based on the order of Eigenvalue) included 'value, expectancy, goal, competency, confidence, organization, monitoring, and strategy'. The remaining factors were just marginally lower than 1, to be capable of inclusion in the category of influential factors. The results show that our questionnaire is a multi-dimensional one and can determine

the students' perception of learning quite efficiently. The following table (4) summarizes the Elgenvalues, variance and cumulative percentage and also the factor loadings for each item used in the questionnaire.

Table 4. Summary of Eigenvalues, Variance, Cumulative % and Factor Loadings

Component/Items	Initial Eigenvalues	Rotation Sums of Squared Loadings		Factor Loadings
	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	
1. value	4.7	14.2	14.2	
i1				.86
i20				.95
2. expectancy	2.47	12.99	27.19	
i2				.64
i3				.81
3. goal setting	2.36	12.8	39.99	
i4				.56
i19				.96
4. competency	1.6	12.6	52.59	
i5				.81
i18				.93
5. confidence	1.4	11.98	64.57	
i14				.93
i17				.94
6. organize	1.2	10.4	74.97	
i8				.84
i12				.95
7. monitoring	1.1	7.41	82.38	
i10				.96
i11				.96
8. strategy	1.02	5.42	87.8	
i9				.73
i13				.94

Following the construct validity establishment as explained above, care was

also taken to ensure the internal consistency of the measurement. The result of reliability analysis showed it to be at an acceptable level; Cronbach's Alpha was found to be .72. It must be noted that the deletion of one item technique further proved that all items have acceptable correlations with the questionnaire, the lowest being .69.

Treatment

The Autonomously managed group (A) served as the experimental group and received a complete learner centered, yet teacher directed instruction. The learners set out to read the texts themselves, rectifying the errors, using their electronic and hard copy dictionaries, practicing both receptive and productive skills cooperatively. Some reinforcement activities such as oral questions and answers, sentence construction, and paragraph writing made up the responsibilities undertaken by the learners. The teacher intervened only when the direction was at the risk of deviation. The language of instruction in the experimental class was predominantly English with infrequent switches into Farsi. The teacher controlled class, despite studying the same course, was strictly controlled by the teacher and teacher's dominant role. It was the teacher who did the reading, explained away the ambiguities, defined the vocabulary items, demystified the structural intricacies, and guided the class forward through questions and practices. The learners were rarely allowed to present themselves freely, nor were they given the chance to extend the lessons to their own personal experiences. The first and the final words were dictated by the teacher and the lesson was closed down only if the teacher decided so. Also, the medium of instruction in the control group was a mixed one, giving priority to English, though the unilateral management of the class hardly provided the opportunity for learners to express themselves out, thus the conditions being conducive to the use of Farsi as a priority. The treatment took 14 weeks, roughly proportional to one semester at the university.

Results and Discussion

This study was intended to investigate the way promotion of autonomy in a language learning class could affect the learners' perception of learning in general. The assumption was that 'will to learn' and 'skills to learn' represent the key dimensions of learning (Artelt et al. 2003). The

different components of learning including forethought and ensuing subcomponents, performance, and self reflection were all supposed to serve as dependent variables and the classroom conditions as independent. In fact, the study was carried out through a specially formulated model of learning predominantly borrowed from Luftenegger et al. (2012) which was slightly adapted and modified.

The findings indicated that the learner centered classroom instructional context was evidently effective in the development of the learners' perspective of what learning could be like. In other words, the autonomous class showed a clearly distinct view of what learning can be like, compared with the teacher controlled class. As can be seen in Table 5 below, the autonomous class evaluated the presumed concepts of learning on a higher scale (Mean=33.06) and at the same time remained quite dispersed and heterogeneous in its understanding (Std.=6.11). This fact confirms that in a class where individual potentials are respected the learners are very likely to vary and adopt the best possible approach to their own advantages. In contrast, a teacher dominated atmosphere lends itself very strongly to maintaining uniformity, and the latitude for possible variation is largely diminished. This is to say that a strict instructional context may bring conformity and thus possibly short term and syllabus based achievement. However, it is doubtful that the lifelong learning which is to be more credited for the learners can also accrue from such a condition (Vansteenkiste et al., 2004). As revealed in the results of the study, it is definite that this theoretical perspective has not grown among the learners of the teacher controlled context.

Table 5. Autonomous versus Teacher-controlled Descriptive Statistics

Class	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
autonomous	32	33.9688	6.11969	1.08182
teacher controlled	27	23.5556	2.72218	.52388

The t-test analysis also supports the idea that the two classes are meaningfully

different in their perception of learning (Table 6). This helps gather that learning a language among other things is not just linked to the cognitive manipulation of the materials but also contingent on the learners' overall approach they adopt towards learning (Thanasoulas, 2000). It is believed that learners' position towards the universe and the learning activity in particular, the sense of self, and eagerness to learn (Benson & Voller, 1997) are tremendously determinants of the how and what of learning (Candy, 1991). In this line of thinking, Wenden (1998) associates the learners' attitudes toward the learning materials as the basic and essential component of any cognitive attempts. He maintains that development of such a capability parallels metacognitive knowledge, which is supposed to serve a governing role in guiding learners' all other potentialities.

Table 6. Inferential Statistics for Two Groups

	t-test for Equality of Means						
	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
						Lower	Upper
Equal variances assumed	8.177	57	.000	10.41319	1.27345	7.86315	12.96324
Equal variances not assumed	8.663	44.337	.000	10.41319	1.20199	7.99126	12.83513

As claimed initially in the formulation of what it means to speculate about learning, learning is a multidimensional concept starting off with initiation into the issue (will to learn), also viewed as forethought or motivational beliefs, and proceeding with involvement in the related tasks (skills to learn), discussed under two categories of performance and self reflection. As for the first category (forethought or motivational

beliefs), the analysis shows that autonomy and joint participation in the classroom activities and decisions extensively and meaningfully (Table 7) modifies the learners' views respecting learning. This idea has already been subscribed to and supported by several other investigations (Deci & Ryan, 2002; Reeve, Nix & Hamm, 2003; Hudley et al. 2007). It is believed that the components of interest, goal orientation, and self efficacy together with their subcategories constitute the basic needs promoting the intrinsic motivation (Deci & Ryan, 2002), which can all be attained through autonomy as an exercise of self determination and responsibility (Lufetengger, 2012). More specifically, the results of this study clearly establish high conformity with some other researches (Ames, 1992; Meece, et al., 2003), indicating that autonomy can promote value, expectancy (making up interest), content goal, competencies (forming 'goal orientation') and confidence and achievement organization (constituting self efficacy). From the overall parameters in the model, confidence as a part of self-efficacy achieves the second rank, which means, as shown by Greene et al. (2004), autonomy can serve as a good predictor for self efficacy. These subcategories of motivational beliefs obviously reveal a mean of above 3 out of a 5 point Likert scale for the autonomous class compared with the mean of around 2 for the teacher controlled class, with the overall analysis being statistically significant. In summary, the first category of the learning is shown to be largely and meaningfully determined by the autonomy as the driving force.

Moving on to the next components of learning (skills to learn) expected to be affected by the autonomy as an underlying determinant; we verifiably discovered that these parameters are also extensions of the forethought stage. In other words, these so-called performance and self regulation dimensions have also followed in the footsteps of the theoretical motivational beliefs, demonstrating the same trend of the autonomy bringing about distinct and meaningful perceptions on the part of the learners. As postulated by Zimmerman (2000) and Meece et al. (2003), current psychological theories could frame the issues of motivation and ensuing performance and self regulation as cyclical, with mainly the former one underpinning and advancing the latter two as two dimensions of skills to learn. The finding in

our study precisely supports the significance and veracity of the presumption. Similarly, Dweck and Molden (2005) maintain that motivational variables are central to the performance and execution of learning actions, and Bandura (1997) asserts that a motivational belief such as self efficacy are strongly linked with the desire to execute some actions to produce given attainments. Of course, this is not to rule out the possibility that the results of the last phases (skills) could not cyclically boost up the motivational beliefs. It must be noted that the autonomous conditions in this study have also promoted most the learners' perceptions of 'monitoring' (first rank) and 'strategy use' (second rank), considered from among all other issues. This finding indicates that skills of performance are largely motivated and developed through the theoretical and motivational attitudes and the two classes could be distinguished in their views of concrete actions based on how motivated, interested, goal oriented they are (Luftenegger et al., 2012). Moreover, the classroom instructional context of autonomy reveals that the learners exercise more of their self evaluation and self criticism when they feel they act to their own wills and wishes (See Table 6 and the last category of self reflection and the two sub categories as a piece of evidence). This finding is exactly in conformity with a number of other international studies (e.g., Vansteenkiste et al. 2004, 2005; Wolters, et al. 1996; Zimmerman & Schunk, 2008). However, it goes contrary to the findings of Luftenegger et al. (2012), who found out that autonomy was in no way a significant determinant of self assessment. Overall, the autonomy supporting class conditions and self reliant approach to learning could qualitatively and characteristically modify the learners' views of what learning is like, which is expected to culminate in positive consequences on the part of learners' decisions for achievement.

Table 7. Analysis of Learning Perception as Detected in Two Groups' Questionnaire-based Responses

Learning Categories			Mean	Std. D.	t	df	Sig. (2-ailed)
Forethought (Motivational Beliefs)	Interest	1. Value	A. 3.3	.89	4.34	57	.000
			T. 2.3	.74	4.4	56	.000
		2. Expectancy	A. 3.3	.94	3.3	57	.001
			T. 2.5	.84	3.4	56	.001
	Goal Orientation	1. Content Goals	A. 3.44	.98	5.44	57	.000
			T. 2.25	.65	5.63	54	.000
		2. Competencies	A. 3.5	.84	2.7	57	.007
			T. 2.85	.94	2.7	52	.008
	Self Efficacy	1. Confidence	**A. 3.62**[2]	1.03	4.57	57	.000
			T. 2.48	.84	4.65	56	.000
		2. Achievement Organization	A. 2.93	.84	1.97	57	.003
			T. 2.48	.93	1.95	52	.004
Performance	Monitoring one's Activities		**A. 4.03**[1]	.89	8.06	57	.000
			T. 2.29	.72	8.21	56	.000
	Application of Strategies		**A. 3.59**[3]	.87	6.62	57	.000
			T. 2.1	.73	6.71	57	.000
Self Reflection	Assessment of Achievement		A. 2.84	1.76	3.25	57	.000
			T. 2	.73	3.37	52	.000
	Criticism of Activities		A. 3.31	.93	5.3	57	.000
			T. 2.14	.71	5.4	56	.000

NOTE: 1. Superscripts (1, 2,3) indicate the rankings from first to third position; 2. 'A' indicates Autonomous and 'T' indicates Teacher controlled classes

Conclusion

This study was conducted to investigate how the promotion of autonomy in an English language learning classroom could have a determining role in the perception of learning, which was formulated into a

number of different components through the analysis and adaptation of different cyclical models. The results as reported above demonstrated that autonomy is distinctively a determinant of learning concept and its constituent elements (Luftenegger et al., 2012). The classroom instruction actually showed that autonomy as a habit of mind could be inculcated in the learners and learning could be conceptually promoted and differentiated depending on the conditions in which learners are treated. Indeed, learners of language could flourish the autonomy based perceptions of what learning would be like and how it would unravel in their mental makeup as a construct.

The result of the study demonstrate that the inculcation of the disposition of autonomy helps learners of the language come closer to the reality and realization of autonomous learning. Following Aristotle, we may postulate that autonomy is a habit of mind or an intellectual virtue that can grow through instruction (Thomson, 2004). It is believed that we can acquire a virtue by exercising it in the same manner that a swimmer learns to swim by swimming. Unquestionably, learners can also become autonomous through practicing autonomous learning and it is this type of preparedness which engenders a particular nature in the learners and fosters their habituation to come full circle (Thomson, 2004). As claimed by Crome et al. (2009), this kind of development in learners denotes a shift from knowledge of practices towards knowledge of how to envisage the general laws (e.g., what learning in general is like) elicited from real conditions. In other words, the learners who are given the chance for guided independent thinking and decision-making can finally enhance their capacity for their transitioning from those who *think with* a paradigm into those pressing forward with *thinking about* the same paradigm (Kuhn, 1962).

In line with Eisner (1969), we think that our learners under autonomous learning context have shown great ability to move towards what has come to be identified as 'expressive objectives' in the education systems. Eisner (1969) actually distinguishes between 'instructional objectives' and 'expressive objectives', arguing that the former can be arrived at by dividing learning into some specific constituents that are delivered in a systematic manner to the learners and are received as packages of knowledge; these

goals are indeed the exact behaviors that learners acquire unambiguously after they have completed their assignments. Based on our experience, the learners in the teacher controlled class planned their courses for the achievement of such academic goals. Beyond these goals, the autonomously managed learners revealed that they have also fulfilled the extracurricular expectations, referred to as hidden objectives (Richards, 2001), or what is called expressive objectives. Eisner believes that expressive objectives are not the behaviors already specified in advance, but an invitation for the learners to explore, or focus on some issues which are of some interest to them. The present autonomous condition has thus pushed the learners to derive the general expressive values from their own class based practice of autonomous learning. Actually, we may claim that the focus on such dispositional practices could build up such far reaching competencies of what learning includes, how learning can bear the best results, and why learning should integrate such practices as forethought, performance and self judgment developmentally into the learners' professional career.

By the same token, this study could have some implications for the higher education in general and language teaching at this level in particular. It is thought that autonomous learning and the associated privileges of independent and critical acts, intrinsic motivations, self managed study and learning, realistic appraisal of one's weaknesses and strengths figure so highly among the goals of higher education. Crome et al (2009) maintain that these issues are not to be easily transferred but they need to be developed through a disposition towards learning that is also part of the acquisition of other types of skills and knowledge. Accordingly, the results of this study reiterate that teachers should move beyond a narrow range of teaching methods towards the ones that help learners develop their potentials for being independent deep in their hearts and minds.

Despite the interpretations made, we believe that the study suffers from a number of methodological restrictions. Further studies where desirable management of external and internal variables is achievable could bridge the existing gap to offer more generalizability. Some such laxities not accounted for in the study include but not restricted to the design-confounding issues of pre and post test homogeneity

assessments, scarcity of the disciplines, and also number of students, from among other issues which could hopefully be eliminated in future investigations. Another important restrictive point, which could have potentially affected the results we have reached in this study, is the type of questionnaire and number of questions used therein. As made clear above, the questionnaire was constructed in accordance with certain definitions adopted from literature, and roughly validated for the content, with each concept represented through two relevant items. With the limited number of questions used in the questionnaire, one is necessarily compelled to be cautious in the interpretation of results.

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