

# DEVELOPING LEARNER'S AUTONOMY TO ENHANCE PUPIL CENTRIC CLASSROOMS

**Ms.J.Keerthickaa**

**Research Scholar, Madurai Kamaraj University,,Madurai.**

**Dr.R.S.Sabeetha**

**Research Supervisor, Assistant Professor of English, E.M.G.Yadava Women's College, Madurai.**

## ABSTRACT

The present generation students have access to many number of ways for flexible learning opportunities. The primary threat for many of them is the English language as it is the language of online resources. They are being taught English right from the start of their schooling but like other theory subjects. The language teachers should bridge the gap between theory and practice in language classes to enhance student's centric classrooms. My paper titled. "Developing Learner's Autonomy to Enhance Pupil Centric Classrooms: Bridging Theory and Practice", intends to throw light on communicative practices through more real-world teaching with a focus on learner's autonomy. I strongly believe that this autonomy will allow learners to make the best use learning opportunities. The real world teaching is not just the combination of technology and classroom teaching but also the combination of language skills learned inside and outside the classroom. This may enhance better learning outcomes adding value to the teaching.

**Keywords:** flexible learning, learner's autonomy, communicative practices, technology, language skills

The present social, cultural, economic and political changes have raised a demand for flexible learning opportunities. The impact of globalisation and the growth of information technology have urged the English language teaching in India take upon new dimensions. At this point, I would like to raise a few questions – Does the methodology, we (English language teachers) use in the classroom makes the students efficient and competitive according to the global trends? Does the input we provide makes them communicate effectively in English? Are we aware of the present and future generation's need to equip themselves with the requisite skills set? The present corporate world want 'tailor-made' graduates to fulfil their accomplishments. The functionality of the language skills has to be embedded into the students, which along with their 'core' content, will enable them to establish themselves.

The above questions intended me to look in to the hindrance in using this language by our students who have been studying it for years. We are fortunate enough as our students, in-various of their medium of study, are exposed to English, at least to some extent. All of them should have studied a 'subject' called English till they complete their higher secondary courses. Till then, what hinders them to communicate well in English? There may be various reasons pointed out for this question but I would like to look into the personalised space that ought to be given for the learners learning any second language. This has made evident of the fact that the traditional way of teaching a second language has ended up in the learner learning the same thing, the same

way. The liberty which makes the students automatically learn a language has been made clearly invisible. The personalised space or the liberty is what I would like to call as the learner's autonomy.

The first and foremost limitation of the traditional way of teaching a language is the lack of motivation by the teachers. We have a fixed syllabus being monitored by the curriculum only to expand within the fixed hours. The resources to learn a language is also limited; many government schools didn't even have a computer till date. Other sociological and psychological reasons fuels up to the limitations which makes the learners unaware of the self-learning aspects. Above all these is the representation of the teacher as an authoritative figure. Our educational system has made our students rely almost completely on teachers for any kind of instruction or strategies. These factors supplement only a limited experience of independent learning. The methodology adopted does not care about making the learners aware of the objectives, strategies or outcomes that play a vital role in creating self-motivated, object-oriented and skilfully trained students. The central point of focus is to get good marks or at least a pass in all the subjects including English. The medium of instruction for higher education is English in-various of the medium he/she has studied at school. But, there are no tests conducted for testing their proficiency level in English.

The presence of the English language in today's world is becoming more significant because of the spreading out of the language in new territories and disciplines. The need to communicate in English is a day to day activity for the majority of the workforce. The present day scenario demands effective communication skills to meet out the challenges in the varied circumstances. The importance of teaching these skills in schools and colleges has not been understood in its proper manner. Speaking a non-native language will be critical for the students but it is more crucial for teaching a second language. But today's world requires professionals who have the ability to communicate effectively as well as efficiently. The same old method of teaching English i.e., repetition of exercises or memorizing passages or poems, would not benefit either the teacher or the student. The methodology must inculcate the training of the four language skills, in short called as LSRW.

The teaching of English language has taken new shapes according to the changing situations. English for specific purposes has been introduced keeping in mind the need of English language for different professionals. This demands the teaching of English should be treated as a skills subject rather than as a mere subject. The difference is that, the teaching should be mostly practical/situation oriented exposing the students to use the language effectively. The language teacher should play the role of a facilitator inside the classroom. They should focus on the outcome of the various activities conducted to the students. The teacher should plan activities that enrich the students use the language with interest as well as understanding the need to learn the language in a better manner.

The changes made in the educational system is at a very slower pace whereas the present generation has several changes in the form of technological advancements that are affordable or attainable to most of them. The learners nowadays even expect technology to be integrated into their language classes and it has been started off earlier but the outcome remains the same as of in a traditional educational system. The learning or computer assisted language learning happens only inside the language lab and sooner or later the learners finds it a

boredom. The English language teacher depends only on the software provided in the lab and there are no additional visuals or other materials made available for many consecutive batch of learners.

I personally feel that the term ‘Autonomy’ feels like a threat for the teacher’s authoritative figure. In his article on learner’s autonomy, David Little points out that,

“All forms of ‘autonomisation’ threaten the power structure of educational culture”.

This term has been widely misunderstood for self-instruction. As well as, the role of a teacher is doubted in the aspect of learner’s autonomy. There are views that the learner’s autonomy will eliminate the teacher from the learning practice. I would like to insist that any higher technology can never replace a teacher. On the other side, the autonomy makes the teacher more responsible than ever before. The long term reliability of the students towards the teachers adds more responsibility to develop learner autonomy in the classroom.

Learner’s autonomy is defined as the ability to take charge of one’s learning and hold the responsibility for all the decisions concerning all aspects of learning. To make it short, it involves a willingness on the part of the learner and make him/her to make the best use of learning opportunities. The willingness or the opportunities can be created only by the teachers. The learner has to attend the English classroom lessons to develop his/her skills of autonomous learning. The English language teacher will be looked upon as facilitators providing valuable resources. Thus, the teacher, the classroom and the institution become an inevitable part of the learner’s environment. As his/her autonomy can never be developed in seclusion, the teacher becomes accountable for the learning environment.

The key aspect of learner’s autonomy is to make the learner to take more responsibility for effective and practically exposed learning. English is a language used commonly as a medium of instruction at schools and colleges but largely used as a medium of communication in the workplace. This paves way for a major gap as the medium of instruction is still taught as a subject and has no connectivity when used as a medium of communication. The workplace usage that demands a fluent usage of the English language is not at all a part in the medium of instruction. By developing the learner’s autonomy, the English language teacher can transcend the learner’s to understand the connectivity between the content taught in the classroom and the real-time usage in the outer world. This provides the teacher a better platform to make the students aware and understand the rationale behind the teaching methodology.

As mentioned earlier, the responsibility of the teacher becomes more evident as he/she has to carefully frame the learning objectives, strategies, course outcomes and methodology according to the skills set of his/her students. A mere 45 – 50 minutes of lecture or classroom handling in English would not be sufficient to meet the needs of the learners. Thus, along with the development of learner’s autonomy, blended teaching learning practices can be imparted in the classroom environment. Autonomy as well as blended practices has to take place both inside and outside the classroom. Task oriented and outcome based activities have to be included by the teacher while framing the objectives and strategies. This directly or indirectly involves the learners to have a continuous learning approach. The teacher can rely upon questionnaires, surveys and discussions to assess the

common requisite skill sets of the learners. He/she can opt from abundant resources available for self-study through multimedia and internet.

The blended teaching learning practices in English language teaching can be viewed as combination of the four language skills – LSRW – pertaining to the level of the learner’s ability in those skills. With reference to higher education, blended learning can be defined as ‘a combination of technology and classroom instruction in a flexible approach to learning that recognises the benefits of delivering some training and assessment online but also use other modes to make up a complete training programme which can improve learning outcomes’. The teacher has to assess the skills set of each of his/her students in order to assign tasks and outcomes. The language skills along with the language functions have to be incorporated by the teacher in order to assess as well as to fulfil the outcomes. The three modes of blended learning i.e., face-face, computer or online, self-study gives better scope for both learner’s autonomy as well as teaching learning practices. This makes the learner use the English language in all the modes through self-motivation as well as facilitated by the teacher.

The blended teaching learning practices should be constructive in motivating the learner’s toward self-study and self-assessment. Because, these practices promotes a continuous learning environment that benefits learner’s autonomy. Another advantage is the involvement of the learner as he/she is made aware of the acquisition of skills. A platform has to be created to cultivate their skills and also to apply them. These practices should provide more opportunities for social and collaborative learning. Engaging the learners in productive social and emotional interactions will improve their confidence as social learning is a powerful tool. Specific technology should not be given priority whereas the approach chosen has to meet the learning objectives and outcomes. Preferences should be given to learner-centric approaches.

The primary focus of the English language teacher should be the learner centred outcomes as they influence both the classroom lecture and learning activities. The teacher has to put forth his effort in implementing activities, objective oriented outcomes and also the learner’s assessment. The activities or tasks assigned should be engaging and challenging in order to make the learning effective. He/she has to make the students aware of the expectations and also time management skills to meet out the deadlines. Self-directed learning is an essential phenomenon in blended learning which demands time management skills. The instructional strategies and learning activities should be planned in such a manner that it contributes to the achievements of the learning outcomes. Timely interactions and prompt feedback by the teacher will certainly help the learner actively engage and involve in the activities.

The blended learning practices can achieve better learning outcomes. There are six reasons why to employ the practices: pedagogical richness, access to knowledge, social interaction, personal agency, cost effectiveness and ease of revision. The following are the points I would like to say as the advantages of learner’s autonomy. They are:

- Learn independently – assess and improves himself
- Willingness – to take on responsibility



- Motivation – can learn a language
- Genuine and optimistic attitude towards language learning
- Setting goals
- Strategies – will look upon the teacher as a facilitator not an authoritative figure
- Self-assessment
- Exploit materials that assist with the acquisition of language

The autonomy as well as the blended teaching learning practices should be executed in such a manner that the learner must be able to enhance his communication methods, either oral or written. He/she must be able to do a presentation, demonstrate an experiment, discuss a current issue or compose a formal e-mail, draft a report, write a project proposal in English by himself.

This clearly states that the methodology adopted to teach English should undergo a rapid change according to the strategies and requirements in the present global scenario. The demand for the ever growing language should be met with greater acquisition. I would like to note here that English is a second language for both the students as well as the teachers. By mentioning this, I intend to say, we, as English language teachers, should update ourselves to the latest developments in ELT pedagogy. We have a superior role to play, as English language teachers, in the lives of our students as they can be made communicatively competent only by us. Making them one really demands a better acquisition of the teachers. We should be able to identify situations that are relevant to use English. This will make the students as well as the teachers to be competent as communicative competence is the need of the hour as our students need to cater their needs by gathering information worldwide.

The usage of social media like WhatsApp can also be used by the language teachers. He / She can form a group for each of their class for formal or professional chats in which English only can be used. This will help the students to communicate better and also to know how to use English in practical situations. The teacher can ask the students to speak and record and share it in the group. He / She can give corrections to individual students to speak better. Videos relating to speaking can be shared by the teacher in the groups. This can be regarded as teaching or using English beyond the classroom which can make the students open up freely and frankly. As the students are fond of using the social networks nowadays, this can be an added advantage. Being a language teacher, we must strive a bit more to make our students communicatively competent in the present scenario. I would like to conclude with the quote of Prof. Jacob Tharu who says,

“English is no longer some remote but a powerful mystery, lying hidden in the world of textbooks and examination.”

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