Abstract

In the 21st century, nothing is as natural to us as learning and accomplishment. We search for a role and work of significance; for companionship, partner and family; for understanding each other and ourselves; for mastery over something and for fulfillment. Our species is irrepresibly curious and restless; we question everything and seek answers; we see a need or possibility and press forward to see if we can make it real. The drive to learn can be suppressed - - we can be deprived, beaten, and drugged-- but these are only frictions to the unstoppable learning momentum that has propelled our species from its prehistoric beginnings to its current civilized state.

Autonomous learning is designed to nurture this momentum, to broaden and deepen it, to help students channel and refine it. In the applied linguistics literature, autonomy is also seen as a capacity for active, independent learning. In the philosophic perspective, autonomy is a capacity – for detachment, critical reflection, decision making and independent action. ‘Autonomization’ is a matter of acquiring those capacities which are necessary to carry out a self-directed learning. In addition, autonomy can be seen as an attitude towards learning in which the learner is prepared to take, or does take, responsibility for his learning. A democratic country like ours needs citizens who can think and act and take decisions and responsibilities independently. Thus promotion of autonomy among the adolescents satisfies that need. The notion has its educational, universal as well as specific needs behind it. In the present century, we have added little significance to these educational ideals --the ones mentioned above-- of promoting self-learning because of many external pressures of the society which demand top ranking in result- oriented examinations, without providing encouragement and inspiration for learning. Most of the
decisions are made by adults. The methodology is primarily pivoting on instruction rather than on construction. Adolescence, the journey into adulthood—into the world, has seldom been more challenging. Globalization is rapidly expanding the economic field of play. Change is dramatically shifting the nature of life and work. Knowledge is doubling every few years. Technology is transforming the way we live and the way we work. Work itself is transformed from the well-protected life-long job to the precarious short-term performance contract. Individuals will not be looked after from the cradle to the grave; increasingly, they must look after themselves. Students must know how to learn every day, how to adapt to rapidly shifting circumstances, and how to take independent initiative whenever in crisis. Learner autonomy prepares students for this new world in which the active learner survives best.

In the pedagogic contexts, it is expected that fundamental conceptual changes in perceptions of teaching should clearly get reflected at all levels of instruction. Although these changes are accommodated in the guidelines of the National Curriculum Framework-2005 with the major shifts in pedagogy clearly stated, the old practices seem to prevail, hesitating to loosen their tight grips. Consequently, a major chunk of these shifts remains as mere concepts at all levels of school education, with a handful of people claiming it as a grand success. The grading system introduced first in Kerala and now in CBSE can be justified in the light of this new paradigm—the cognitive constructive paradigm—prescribed by the curriculum which aims at learners to think critically, construct knowledge socially and learn autonomously. Hence this research has tried to explore the possibilities of improving the teaching/learning scenario of ESL in our country so that our learners become autonomous in ESL learning, which will stand in good stead to them. The researcher views learners’ proficiency and their necessary competences in English as the most valuable in their whole life. If they can be molded into independent learners or
autonomous learners, we are teaching them how to fish, instead of giving them fish when they are hungry.

The present research has stemmed out of a natural and intense feeling of this researcher’s long-time experience as a teacher of English and around fifteen years of experience as a teacher-trainer cum material producer. This feeling got intensified when SCERT Kerala adopted social constructivism as the guiding principle in preparing materials for learners up to class XII, in 2005. The conceptualization workshops could not convince the resource group who were, in turn, to educate the other resource groups and teachers. The very simple common sense that without a strong knowledge base, the learners cannot construct higher level knowledge or cannot develop higher order thinking skills, was overlooked. As a result, in every teacher gathering, volley of questions came from the participants, and the resource persons could not give satisfactory answers to all of them. The source books were full of recurring and hollow jargons. In short, ESL instruction at the senior secondary level suffered from shortcomings at all levels. This state of affairs channeled this research into the philosophical underpinnings and psychological undercurrents of ESL instruction in the new paradigm.

Once the new paradigm has been introduced, the performance level of the senior secondary students (of state board schools) in English tends to be rather pitiable. With the introduction of the new pedagogy, which claims to be the product of cognitive-constructivist paradigm, many of the teachers of primary and high school classes fall under the mythical notion that learners construct knowledge on their own and no intervention is needed by the teachers. The very same mythical notion extends unto the senior secondary even. The much glorified term, ‘facilitator’, is taken as equal to that of a passive spectator to the chaotic mishaps in the English classrooms where phrases like, “I am going”, “she is died”, “I have going”, “she dancing”, etc.
are used and get fossilized. Theories accepted in L1 contexts are applied in L2 instruction, and if anyone dares to give practice in writing-patterns or spelling/structure drills, she will be penalized. “No repetition or drilling”, goes the strict warning of the DRGs, a group of LP/UP School teachers confided to this writer. Still, they (not all) practice what they consider will work for their learners, they said. This situation leads to the unpleasant fact that whatever NCF 2005 envisages, does not work at the grass route level, except in a few schools with resourceful teachers. One of the reasons, it is assumed, is that most of the teachers and material producers have either formed a mistaken theoretical basis or they have not constructed the relevant knowledge at all. As a result, the proficiency level of the learners who go to ordinary government schools gradually comes down. This research has literally explored the vast repertoire of (second) language acquisition theories and experimental studies reported in different parts of the world and by different groups of researchers, to reach at a reliable conclusion. Each concern expressed here has been validated with sufficient theoretical support and with reliable research findings of the authentic writers and researchers in the field.

Another contingency calls for immediate attention may be attributed to the learner needs, especially to the learners who pass out from senior secondary classes. Unless they acquire sufficient proficiency in communicative competence and linguistic competence, and unless they get trained to learn on their own, the learners may not get a chance again in their whole life.

Therefore, an attempt to address these problems is worth the trouble is the first motive behind this study. In short, the assumption on which this research revolves is that the present teaching/learning scenario (of ESL) of the senior secondary schools in our country lack a strong
and convincing theoretical basis for making the learners autonomous and knowledge constructors.

Based on the assumptions related to the present status of ESL instruction in Kerala and generally in the country, this study hypothesizes that learning and teaching of English as a second language at the intermediate level will be more productive and cost-effective (in terms of time, energy and money) if learners and teachers are made aware of:

1. the rich potentials of pedagogic constructs such as learner autonomy, learning strategies and communication strategies, and

2. the implications of psycholinguistic factors such as metacognitive knowledge and metalinguistic knowledge at all levels of instruction, namely, curriculum planning, syllabus designing, material production, classroom instruction, teacher training, and testing and evaluation.

This study is predominantly a qualitative one. Thirty long years of teaching experience in various classrooms under varying conditions throughout the State of Kerala and some parts of South India, has shaped this researcher’s opinion regarding different factors contributing to learning ESL. Originally triggered as a series of amateur action research, this study has its firm roots in classroom experiences. The present study may be viewed as the result of a quest seeking the underlined reasons of success and failures in ESL classrooms during the long career as a teacher and for a short period as a teacher trainer. The quest related to the effectiveness and ineffectiveness of isolated classroom strategies led to some of the theoretical underpinnings related to learning in general, language learning in particular and specifically, learning a second language through formal instruction.
The present research revolves around the concept of autonomous learning of ESL where the locus falls to be at the construction of knowledge. So, the introductory chapter—TOWARDS AUTONOMY-- examines the socio-political, economic and other contingencies that lead to the concept of autonomy in learning. Definitions and theoretical underpinnings supporting this concept have also been explored in Chapter I. Besides, a detailed presentation of the present instructional scenario (ESL) in our country substantiates the relevance of the research. The major shifts envisaged by NCF-2005 points to the need for a drastic change at the conceptual level.

Chapter II—EXPLORING ADOLESCENT PSYCHE-- gives importance for the psycho-social concerns of adolescent learners in our Indian classrooms. Their physical as well as cognitive development is studied with special reference to learning English as a second language. Although their physical and psychological developments are ready for autonomy, the process of learning depends on other factors like self-esteem, self-respect, ego centristm, self-efficacy beliefs, peer pressures, peer influence, and other disorders. While discussing these characteristic features of the adolescent self, this chapter gives assistance in tackling these stormy group’s issues related to conduct and behavior. Learning disorders are listed and a peripheral knowledge about the symptoms and remedial measures for learning disorders are mentioned hoping this would encourage teachers to study each learner in a more matured way. The role of motivation in promoting autonomy and learning has been the topic of study all over the world. This study accepts intrinsic motivation as more encouraging for autonomous learning. Attribution theory is probably the most influential contemporary theory with implications for academic motivation. The basic principle of attribution theory as it applies to motivation is that a person's own perceptions or attributions for success or failure determine the amount of effort the person will expend on that activity in the future. In order to take responsibility for our own learning we must
believe that we have control over learning success and failure, and consequently attribution theory has important implications for the promotion of autonomy.

To make learners autonomous, achievement goal orientations and motivational beliefs play a complementary role. Teachers have both the opportunity and the responsibility for cultivating healthy motivational beliefs in their students. By fostering beliefs grounded in positive goal orientations, teachers will increase the likelihood that their classroom will be a dynamic, high achieving learning environment. Adolescents experience rapid physical, cerebral, and hormonal change that is often destabilizing. Among the transformations or passages that they must address, the most important is establishing and confirming a personal, stable identity. Key features of this formation are the development of reflection, character, and competence. The major transition they face is from dependent childhood to independent early adulthood in which they must secure new freedom and meet the responsibilities that go with it. Autonomous learning programs should be designed to cultivate the successful accomplishment of these changes in the pursuit of excellence as a person, points out this chapter.

chapter III—AUTONOMY: PHILOSOPHICAL UNDERPINNINGS AND PSYCHOLOGICAL UNDERCURRENTS—examine in detail the different and disparate philosophical perspectives converging towards learner autonomy taking into account the behaviorist principles, structural theories, cognitive and constructive theories, humanist psychology and the theories stemmed out of it like: experiential learning, cooperative learning, collaborative teaching, reflection and awareness/conscious raising. While thinking about the different ways and means of language acquisition, the thinkers and scholars like Labove, Skinner, Piaget, Vygotsky, Bruner, Chomsky, Krashen, Ryle, Bloom and others have been referred to. The ESL learning/acquisition, competence/performance, adaptation, perception and cognition, LAD and ZPD, cultural
psychology and narrative, individual construct and social construct of meaning, teaching and facilitating, guiding and counseling etc. are a few terms that call for special attention in this chapter. The philosophical and psychological theories overlap as each method and approach behind the concept of ‘learning to learn’ has their roots in both. As the first step of implementing these theories and ideas, needs analysis (NA) has been included here, in this chapter itself. NA is divided into two: learners’ concrete needs such as job requirements, and requirements for learning ESL. Again, the needs are treated as subjective needs and objective needs. Since autonomous learning demands more attention on subjective needs than objective needs, this chapter goes into two sets of priorities – individual differences and learning styles. In other words psychological or cognitive bearing on learning style of each individual and the different strategies to be acquired by the learner through pedagogy are studied, based on the experimental studies of Oxford and her associates, Tarone and Yule, Canale and Swain, Hutchinson and Waters, O’Malley and Chamot and others. For learning styles, Ian Tudor, Oxford and Ehrman and others are referred to.

Subjective needs of learners are again divided into various levels with sufficient illustrations and suggestions. Certain strategies and tools to collect data on learner needs (e.g. think-aloud protocol) are also listed in this chapter and finally the names of the self-learning centers acknowledged internationally are also mentioned to substantiate the practical functioning of the very idea of learner autonomy or learning how to learn through self-access centers.

In Chapter IV—LEARNER PERFORMANCE: STYLES, STRATEGIES AND ASSESSMENT-- the researcher has tried to probe into that realm of mind where strategies lay hiding, concealing their powers, misleading sometimes but rarely springing up to surprise us with their magical megawatts. Strategies and their classification never go free of disputes. But a consensus has
reached where trespassing is allowed into any sector whether cognitive or metacognitive or socio-affective. The theoretical underpinnings examined, the implications analyzed, the relevance weighed out, the next step, that is the effective employment of these strategies in the ESL classrooms, has been practically verified with a group of students and reported, this chapter has taken the theories to their practicable plane. A comprehensive list of learning strategies that fall under different categories like cognitive, metacognitive, affective, socio-affective, direct, indirect etc. and the definitions of strategies like planning, directed attention, selective attention, self-management, self-monitoring (again divided), problem identification, repetition, resourcing, grouping, note taking, note making, deduction, induction, substitution, elaboration, summarization, translation, inference etc. with sub-strategies, draw the attention of learners and teachers. Whether these strategies are to be included in the course books directly or taught in separate slots can be decided by the teachers or the authorities concerned.

Some serious doubts regarding the practicability of the constructs—learner autonomy, learning strategies and communication strategies—have also been cleared in this chapter. The researcher’s humble attempt to reiterate what she already knows from her experience is given in a very brief manner. As stated earlier, this study has attempted to review the psycholinguistic theories of learning a second language to clear the doubts which have been haunting the teacher cum researcher for some time. However, a humble attempt to try her findings on the learners has proved to be fruitful and rewarding.

The last chapter—CONCLUSION: FROM THEORY TO PRACTICE—consolidates the results of the present research. To make our learners autonomous and creative, all supporting elements of
learning and teaching should undergo drastic change. But the present Kerala situation – academic and pedagogic – which claims to believe in teaching English not as L2 but as L1 has turned out to be a ‘failed pedagogy’ as far as teaching/learning English is considered. The fate of second language instruction in Europe and the U S claims no better, as reported in many articles. The reasons may vary but the results remain the same. Hence this research puts forward the suggestions under three heads: men, methods and management. Men include learners, teachers, and other stakeholders in general. By methods, classroom instruction, teacher training and testing and evaluation are meant. Management means curriculum planning, syllabus designing and material production, in this context. At conceptual levels the underlying principles are brought to the surface so that a strong theoretical basis may convince those concerned of why they have to look at learning/teaching in a new light. At practical levels this study reminds the practicing teachers about the way they can manipulate the simple things they do in their classes to a highly motivating and useful learning activity which foster to the concept of autonomous learning.

To sum up, this study has explored the vast repertoire of learning theories and SLA theories to discover the suitable ones for our adolescents, who are denied an exposure-rich environment at home as well as at school, to become autonomous learners in ESL. Based on these theoretical underpinnings, this study has put forward a number of suggestions (in ideas and practices) which may be followed by teachers, curriculum planners, evaluators, teacher educators, teacher trainers, material producers, decision makers and educational agencies. By innovations in ideas, this study has attempted to clarify the misconceptions of teachers and teacher educators/trainers regarding the paradigm shift in the present pedagogy—cognitive constructive paradigm. It is in fact a search for clarifying the teacher-researcher’s own confusion and doubt (shared by many of her colleagues) as a teacher trainer and a material producer. The
theoretical background and experimental studies related to the new pedagogic contexts are examined before arriving at the conclusions. Indeed, the conclusions arrived at are not final, neither absolute. Personal experience as a learner and teacher of ESL has its telling on agreeing or disagreeing with the line of argument of any particular author or theoretician. Nevertheless, the most authentic writers are selected for conceiving the right concepts that underlie the new pedagogy. The interface between instruction and construction, the emergence of the autonomous learner, at the ESL context of our country has been thoroughly weighed out, and strategies to assist this emergence of the individuals to rise to the levels of learning without frontiers have been compiled and a few of them modified for selection and reference.

By innovations in practices, this study has put forward a number of practical suggestions for actual practice in Indian context. Worth mentioning are: types of learner-contracts, think-aloud protocols, setting up of self-access centers, ELTI F- designed activities and the comprehensive list of techniques and strategies for self-learning and self-assessment. The unlimited possibilities of peer-roles in learning through cooperative mode gives this study the momentum to reach the target—autonomous learning.

The ideas and practices suggested in this study cannot claim the researcher’s own findings. Valuable sources of authentic written work, domain experts’ honest reports and interviews, public opinions from parents and stakeholders, unstructured interviews, incidental talks with learners and experts in other fields, all contributed their share. At times the distinction between L1 and L2 caused great confusion in arriving at a conclusion. The debate, Krashen vs Maclaughlin, is still going on. But the researcher’s conclusion is antithetical to Krashen’s as far as learning English in Indian contexts, especially with government and aided school students, are concerned. Whether English is learned consciously or not, the researcher would rather agree with
Stern that ‘we regard the use of the term ‘language acquisition’ as of no theoretical significance and treat it as a purely stylistic alternative to ‘language learning’. One last word to remind: any shift in routine costs teachers dearly. It costs them time to learn the new approach, time to plan differently, time to gather new materials, and time to convince the heads of institutions and parents, of the value of this new approach. Unless the government provides organized, thoughtful, and long term continuing professional development, reduce the number of students in one division (it is 60 in Kerala), and prepare materials suitable for the age level and the new concept, the new pedagogy will be known as a failed pedagogy. Hope this humble attempt will help to realize the objectives envisaged by NCF-2005. Finally, it is recommended that there should be further research and experimentation to validate the conclusions drawn in this study.
Declaration

I, Beena Philip M, hereby declare that the thesis entitled *Autonomous Learning: From Instruction to Construction* has not previously formed the basis for the award of any degree, diploma, associateship, fellowship or other title or recognition.

Beena Philip M
Research Scholar in English,
Post Graduate Department of English and Research Center,
Govt. Brennen College,
Thalassery,
Kerala- 670106.

Place:

Date:
Certificate

This is to certify that the thesis entitled *Autonomous Learning: From Instruction to Construction* submitted to Kannur University for the award of Doctor of Philosophy in English is a bonafide record of research carried out by Ms. Beena Philip M, under my guidance and supervision that no part of it has been presented before for any degree, diploma, title or recognition.

Supervising Teacher

Dr. P. Bhaskaran Nair
Reader
Department of English
Pondicherry University
Pondicherry - 605014

Place:

Date:
AUTONOMOUS LEARNING: FROM INSTRUCTION TO CONSTRUCTION

BEENA PHILIP. M

Supervisor

DR. P. BHASKARAN NAIR
Reader
Department of English
Pondicherry University
Pondicherry - 605014

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy in English

Post Graduate Department of English and Research Center
Government Brennen College Thalassery
Kerala – 670106

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To my father, late Mr. M J Philip, who made me think critically,

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To my affectionate teacher, late Prof. R Ramachandran, whose blessings I always sought, and

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LEARNER AUTONOMY

BEENA PHILIP

Ph. D
ENGLISH

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I was senseless and ignorant; you hold me by my right hand.

You guide me with your counsel, and afterward you will take me into glory.

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