Abstract

Learner autonomy and self-directed learning have increasingly gained much prominence as important themes both in the field of education and language teaching. The need to steer the boat of education towards making students become responsible learners is becoming more and more glaring with the fast paced and constantly changing times. In an era of global communication, it may be observed that there is a need to prepare learners to meet with the challenges of life and one important aspect in this regard is ‘writing’. The dominance of internet, digital media and also the competitive job market has increased the importance of written communication considerably. Further, in all academic contexts, the ability to write well positively correlates with academic success. In many ways, proficiency in writing is a precondition for success both in academic and professional contexts.

The study has been placed within the premise that enabling learner autonomy in writing could be considered as a viable way to optimize learning and was driven with the objective of exploring the ways in which learners can be motivated to write better. In this regard, the study sought to explore the ways in which the person-centred approach (Rogers 1969) can motivate learners towards becoming better writers.

Theoretically, the study situates itself within the humanistic paradigm and adopts a learner-centred outlook in its proposition that ‘learner autonomy’ is the ultimate objective of education and the cultivation of which would result from a learning context where both the cognitive and affective dimensions are considered. It is here
that the study explored the impact of implementing a person-centred approach in the teaching of writing.

The study has been placed at the Tertiary level within the context of Nagaland where the educational system is still predominantly traditional and the notion of learner autonomy is absent. While tertiary level students are expected to be more responsible and self-directed in learning, the education system in Nagaland presents a contrasting picture. The classrooms in Nagaland are teacher-centred where the general classroom setting takes the form of lecture-seminar style and students’ play the role of audiences and the only way the mechanism of writing operates is mastering and reproducing teacher-provided notes. Consequently, the scope of students developing their writing skill becomes highly limited. The study therefore attempted to outline the problems and disadvantages of such a setting while exploring the advantages of shifting towards more learner-friendly approaches in education in general and training writing skills in particular.

The study was conducted in Alder College, Kohima, Nagaland, with the B.A second Semester English Honours students as the participants for a duration of three months in three phases; Pre-intervention, Intervention and Post-Intervention. The pre-intervention phase was devoted towards understanding the context better with particular focus on how writing is treated in the classroom and also on both teachers and learners’ perception about writing. The intervention phase was implemented in the form of a course on writing skills designed along the principles and values afforded by the person-centred approach. The post-intervention phase was dedicated towards gathering data on the impact of the intervention. The study paid attention not
only to the changes in the learners’ writing development but also in their attitudinal changes to highlight the importance of the affective dimension in learning.

The results derived from the study indicated that students were motivated to engage in the writing tasks and this enhanced motivation was observed to have had an impact on their improvements in writing performance. The study also reported positive attitudinal changes in the learners both towards writing and themselves as writers which had been concluded to be a positive correlate with their writing performance. On the whole, the study has been an attempt at reasserting the need of learner-friendly approaches in the field of teaching L2 writing.

The chief objective of the study had been to initiate and help learners become responsible and self-directed in their learning. The entire study had been organized and presented in six chapters. Chapter One provides an insight into the context and background of the study serving as an introduction to the study. Chapter Two then takes up the domain of L2 writing which is the central subject of the study. It explicates the issues and challenges pertaining to L2 writing and raises the need for approaches in writing to give equal importance to both cognitive and affective aspects of learning. Chapter Three provides a comprehensive understanding of the theoretical and conceptual orientations of the study. It provides an overview of the concept of ‘learner autonomy’ and ‘person-centred approach’ substantiated with empirical evidences from existing literature. Chapter Four provides the methodological framework of the study and is devoted towards describing the tools used for data generation as well as the nature and procedure in which the study was conducted. Chapter Five takes up the task of presenting and analysing the data
generated through the use of both quantitative and qualitative procedures. Chapter Six then attempts at summarizing the study. It provides a glimpse of the study’s outcomes, the implications it has both theoretically and practically on the teaching of writing. It also discusses the limitations of the study and provides some potential pathways for further research.