Iraqi EFL School Teachers' Perceptions of Enhancing Learner Autonomy in Their CLT Classes

اراء مدرسي اللغة الانكليزية في التعليم الثانوي في تعزيز استقلالية المتعلم في الفصول الدراسية التي تتبع الطريقة التواصلية

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Iraqi EFL School Teachers' Perceptions of Enhancing Learner Autonomy in Their CLT Classes

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الملخص

تلعب استقلالية المتعلم دورًا مهمًا في تطوير متعلمي اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية. وبشكل أكثر تحديدًا، في الفصول الدراسية التي تتبع الطريقة التواصلية والتي تعتبر المتعلم محور العملية التعليمية ، تعد تصورات المعلمين لاستقلالية المتعلم أمرًا بالغ الأهمية لأن معتقداتهم حول التعلم المستقل تؤثر على تطوير استقلالية المتعلم. وبالتالي، تهدف الدراسة إلى إظهار تصورات معلمي مدارس اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية الذين يطبقون الطريقة التواصلية في سياق التدريس الخاص بهم فيما يتعلق باستقلالية المتعلم وكيف يمكنهم تعزيزها في فصولهم الدراسية من خلال توزيع استبيان على (40) مدرسًا عراقيًا للغة الإنجليزية في مدارس مختلفة.

بناء على نتائج الدراسة فإن مدرسي اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية في المرحلة الثانوية العراقيين لا يعتقدون أن التعلم المستقل يؤدي إلى تطور في تعلم اللغة حيث يبررون ذلك بعدم قدرة متعلمي اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية على اتخاذ قرارات بشأن ماذا وكيف يتعلمون بسبب عدم نضجهم. حاجتهم الملحة إلى الكثير من التوجيه والتعليم.

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بينت الدراسة ايضا انه نادرًا ما يحضر مدرسو اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية في المرحلة الثانوية العراقية برامج تدريب المعلمين حول استقلالية التعلم، لذلك فانهم يفتقرون إلى الخبرة حول هذا النوع من التعلم وهم غير مجهزين بالتقنيات التي تعزز استقلالية المتعلمين. أشارت الدراسة إلى أن مبدأ المعلم هو محور العملية التعليمية لا يزال فعليًا مطبقا في المدارس الثانوية العراقية على الرغم من اعتماد الطريقة التواصلية في المدارس الثانوية العراقية مما يشير إلى سوء تطبيق الطريقة . كما أشارت الدراسة إلى أن متعلمي اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية غير مدربين على تطبيق استراتيجيات التعلم المستقل وهي الاستراتيجيات المعرفية أو ما وراء المعرفية أو الاجتماعية .

Abstract

Learner autonomy plays an important role in developing learners for a fruitful language learning/teaching process in EFL classes. More specifically, in CLT classes; a learner-centered method whereby personalized learning is emphasized and teaching learners how to access resources and how to use them for their learning needs has become increasingly important. Teachers' perception on learner autonomy is crucial because their beliefs about independent learning affects the development of learner autonomy. Thus, the study aims to manifest Iraqi EFL school teachers' perceptions who apply CLT method in their teaching context regarding learner autonomy and how can they enhance it in their CLT classes throughout distributing a questionnaire to (40) Iraqi EFL teacher in different schools. Based on the findings of the study , Iraqi EFL secondary teachers do not believe that autonomous learning leads to development in language learning as they justify that by Iraqi EFL learners ' incapability to take decisions of what and how to learn due to their immaturity and their insisting need of much guidance and instruction.

Chapter One

1.1Statement of the problem:

Learner autonomy addresses their ability to comprehend the concepts that allows them to learn independently on their own. In other words, it means learners' capability of understanding the practical usages of what they have learnt in the classroom and utilizing it to expand that insight on a daily basis without any assistance all by themselves. That means that they are going to be able to achieve independence in the learning. This would imply that successfully implementing learner autonomy enhances the subject's resourcefulness and keeps them from going through the

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same learning process over and over again, making their learning quick and efficient.

As learners of English as the target language in Iraqi schools ,students spend a considerable amount of time in learning it inside the class which extend to twelve years whereby CLT is the adopted method. This method is described as learner-centered method and which greatly emphasizes personalized learning , the study aims to explore Iraqi EFL school teachers' perception of learner autonomy and how can it be fostered in their CLT classes.

1.2 The aim of the study: The study aims at investigating Iraqi EFL school teachers' perceptions of learner autonomy and how can it be fostered in their CLT classes.

1.3 The limitation of the study: The study is limited to a distinctive pedagogical factor which effects on EFL teaching /learning process, namely learner autonomy. The study is limited to Iraqi EFL school teachers who apply CLT method and their perceptions of enhancing learner autonomy in their classes
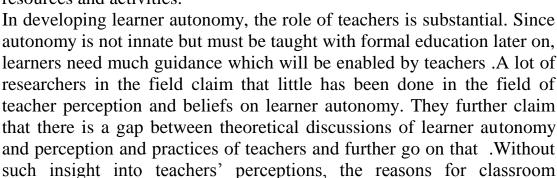
Chapter Two
2.1Review of The related literature
Introduction

Learner autonomy is defined as the ability to take charge of one's own learning. Autonomous learners are accepted to be capable of putting realistic and reachable learning goals, selecting appropriate methods and techniques to be adopted, monitoring their own learning process, and assessing the progress of their own learning with the help of teachers to a certain degree .Autonomy implies a capacity to exercise control over one's own learning. Principally, autonomous learners are able to:

• self-determine the overall direction of their
learning,

• become actively involved in the management of
the learning process,

• exercise freedom of choice in relation to learning
resources and activities.

In developing learner autonomy, the role of teachers is substantial. Since autonomy is not innate but must be taught with formal education later on, learners need much guidance which will be enabled by teachers .A lot of researchers in the field claim that little has been done in the field of teacher perception and beliefs on learner autonomy. They further claim that there is a gap between theoretical discussions of learner autonomy and perception and practices of teachers and further go on that .Without such insight into teachers' perceptions, the reasons for classroom

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practices may not be comprehended fully. Teachers play a vital role in the development of learner autonomy, and it is the only way to understand what kind of autonomy practices are implemented in classrooms. In addition, their teaching practices are underpinned by teacher perceptions and their practices resulting from these perceptions further support or prevent their thoughts on learner autonomy.

2.1 The role of teachers' perceptions in relation to teaching practices

Researchers have indicated that teachers' beliefs play an important role in teaching practice. The role and importance of beliefs have been studied in several key areas of English Language Teaching (ELT). They analyzed how teachers' beliefs interact with teaching and learning goals and influence the moment-to-moment actions of teaching in the classroom. They emphasized that beliefs play a central role in a teachers' selection and prioritization of goals and actions. A person's beliefs is defined as a proposition that is personally held with or without consciousness; this proposition has an impact on the holder's behaviour, therefore, beliefs must be inferred from what people say, intend, and do .

2.2 Teachers' techniques to enhance learner autonomy:

Fostering learner autonomy is regarded as an attempt to help learners become more independent through training them on the effective use of the language learning strategies which make them responsible to take control, evaluate and monitor their language learning process. These learning strategies include the following:

- **Cognitive Strategies**: These strategies involve thought processes which learners use to deal with tasks and materials such as memorization, guessing the meaning of words, etc.

- **Meta-cognitive Strategies**: in which learners attempt to regulate their learning through planning, self-monitoring, evaluating and thinking about how to make this process effective.

- **The Socio-affective Strategies**: help learners to interact with other speakers of the target language, to collaborate on tasks and ask for correction. These strategies aim to enhance self-confidence, motivation and lowering anxiety. Accordingly, There are three basic pedagogical norms to foster learner autonomy especially in language classrooms:

- **Learner involvement** : is to make learners engaged in the learning process through sharing responsibility (affective and metacognitive dimensions);

- **Learner reflection** : helping learners to reflect on the process of planning, monitoring and assessing their learning (metacognitive dimension);

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- **Appropriate target language use** : the target language can be used as a fundamental instrument for language learning (communicative and metacognitive dimensions).

Once learners feel that they are appreciated and their abilities trusted, they can gain a feeling of ownership and responsibility of their own learning. In other words, learners need to be encouraged and stimulated by their teacher who should trust their capacities in order to give them a sense of self-confidence which contributes effectively in raising their autonomy.

To posit ways of fostering learner autonomy ,Dislen (2011) cites three ways to foster learner's autonomy: self-report; diaries and evaluation sheets, and learners' belief and attitude.

Self-report is a good way of collecting information on how students go about a learning task and helping them become aware of their own strategies is to assign a task and have them report what they are thinking while they are performing it.

Diaries and evaluation sheets offer students the possibility to plan, monitor, and evaluate their learning, identifying any problems they run into and suggesting solutions. In as much as the success of learning and the extent to which learners tap into their potential resources in order to overcome difficulties and achieve autonomy are determined by such factors as learners' motivation, their desire to learn, and the beliefs they hold about themselves as learners and learning per se, it is manifest that changing some negative beliefs and attitudes is bound to facilitate learning.

2.3 The relation between CLT and Learner Autonomy:

The concept of autonomy in language learning is linked to the communicative approach both historically and theoretically. In an important account of the history of autonomy in language learning, many studies argued that the rise of autonomy in language learning in the 1970s and 1980s was connected to a broad rejection of behaviorist assumptions about the nature of second language acquisition. This rejection was apparent in a number of fields such as speech act theory, discourse analysis, the ethnography of communication, language in education and the sociology of language. Although the theory of autonomy in language learning, as it developed for example in the work of Holec (1981) and Little (1997), was influenced by research from beyond the field of language education, it also drew on communicative language learning theory. And in the

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1990s, several researchers associated with theory. And in the 1990s, several researchers associated with the development of the communicative approach

Although many definitions of autonomy in language learning make little or no reference to the specifics of second language acquisition, some researchers have attempted to incorporate communicative assumptions within their descriptions of autonomy .Thus, the connection between autonomy in language learning and the

communicative approach is, therefore, relatively well developed at a theoretical level.

Practically, communicative language teaching (is a learner-centered approach for language teaching and learning. In the CLT context, learner's role changes from that of a passive receiver to an active participant engaging in diverse classroom activities that promote communicative competence. Again, L2 learners are supposed to learn the language by using it for different tasks, and taking part in pair work, group work, role play, and discussion inside classrooms. Most of the classroom activities in CLT are carried out around learners. The teacher is supposed to direct the learner centered class, and work as a guide, a facilitator. Learners often complete different tasks assigned by teachers to engage themselves in real communication using authentic materials. They work in pairs and groups to get these tasks done.

Chapter Three
Methodology

3. 1The Sample: to (40) male and female Iraqi EFL teachers in different secondary schools was chosen randomly

3.2 Research Instrument : A questionnaire form was conducted as a tool for the study.

3.2.1 Constructing the questionnaire items

The questionnaire form consists of (10) question items regarding teacher's beliefs about learners' autonomy with possible options . The testees are required to choose one of the provided possible options .

3.3 Statistical means

A percentage formula was adopted to compute the research results

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Chapter Four
The Analysis of Results

To obtain the reseach results, statistical means was used to check the frequency and the percentage of each option of each item of the questionaire as shown in the following table:

Items	Options	Frequency	Percentage
1-	a-	10	25%
	b-	3	7.5%
	c-	22	55 %
	d-	5	12.5 %
2-	a-	31	77.5%
	b-	5	12.5%
	c-	4	10%
3-	a-	6	15%
	b-	34	85%
4-	a-	9	22.5%
	b-	31	77.5%
5-	a-	30	75%
	b-	4	10%
	c-	6	15%
6-	a-	32	80%
	b-	2	5%
	c-	6	15%
7-	a-	6	15%
	b-	5	12.5%
	c-	29	72.5%
8-	a-	32	80%
	b-	8	20%
9-	a-	4	10%
	b-	36	90:%
10-	a-	6	15%
	b-	34	85%

The questions addressed to the teacher s' perception for learner autonomy shows the following results:

With reference to Q1 responses, teachers vary in considering their role in promoting or enhancing the learner autonomy, 55% of them see that is totally learners responsibility whereas 25:% believe their role as neutral and limited to the instructions given.12.5%see their role as being motivators .Only 7.5 % believe that they are the only responsible for promoting or enhancing the learner autonomy.

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Responses to Q2 show that77.5% teachers believe that the concept of responsibility of language classroom is limited to teachers only while12.5% believe that it is shared teachers and learners. Only 10% 0f them believe that it is learners responsibility.

With regard to Q3 85% of teachers believe that it is their responsibility for evaluating learners performance during class-interaction while only 15% of them believe to give chances to learners to evaluate their performance by themselves during class-interaction.

For Q4 which is related to learners errors , 77.5% of teachers show that they are responsible to correct learners errors while 0nly 22.5% of them let other learners participate in errors correction.

Regarding Q5, 75% of teachers show their rejection to do any addition , elimination or modification to the course book tasks , other 15% show that it is rarely done whereas only 10% show that they sometimes do it .

80% of responses of Q6 show that they never attend teacher training programs about autonomy , 15% show that it is rarely done and only 5% of them show that they sometimes do.

As for Q7 which is related to what teachers think secondary school students are supposed to be, 12.5%   think that they are decision makers: they are involved in making a map for the lesson, 15% believe that learners are decision takers: they have the free will to choose among a list of proposals about what they will to learn whereas 72.5% believe learners are neither decision makers nor decision takers.

Responses to Q8 show that 80% of teachers think that secondary school students are Passive: they receive, not produce whereas 20% of them think them active: interact and produce.

Regarding Q9, 90% of teacher showed their rejection to provide students with tasks that reflect their personal lives and interests and they prefer professional content that is not personal while only 10% agree to provide such tasks.

Finally, responses to Q10 show that 15% of teachers ask their students to give a feedback of a given type of task if they like it or not

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whereas 85% of them do not do so as they believe that such tasks suit them perfectly.

Chapter Five

Conclusions

The study came up with the following conclusions :

1-Based on the findings of the study , Iraqi EFL secondary teachers do not believe that autonomous learning leads to development in language learning as they justify that by Iraqi EFL learners ' incapability to take decisions of what and how to learn due to their immaturity and their insisting need of much guidance and instruction.

2- Iraqi EFL secondary teachers rarely attend teacher training programs about learning autonomy ,so they lack experience about such type of learning and they are not equipped with the techniques that enhance learners to be autonomous.

3-Teacher-centred learning is still actually applicable in Iraqi secondary schools though CLT (the learner-centered method) is adopted Iraqi secondary schools which marks CLT misapplication .

4-As a result of the above conclusions, Iraqi EFL learners are not trained to apply different learning strategies, namely cognitive, metacognitive, socio-affective or reflective strategies. They are mere passive learners.

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Appendix

The Questionnaire form

Dear Teachers:

Encircle the option for each of the following questions in the presented form that complies with what you believe as an EFL teacher :

Questions	options
Q1: What do you think are the teacher 's roles in promoting an autonomous class?	**a- Neutral: little engagement in making instructions.** **b- Active: the teacher is the only responsible.** **c- Passive: not active and students are responsible.** **d- Motivator.**
Q2: How do you consider the concept of responsibility in the language classroom?	**a- Teacher's responsibility.** **b- Shared between teacher and student.** **c- Student's responsibility.**
Q3:Do you let your students evaluate their performance during class-interaction to themselves ?	**a- Yes.** **b- No, it's the teacher's task**
Q4:How can you correct the students' errors?	**a-I correct it immediately** **b- I let other students correct it**
Q5: Do you add, eliminate or modify the course book tasks?	**a- Never** **b- Sometimes** **c- Rarely**
Q6-Do you usually attend teacher training programs about autonomy?	**a- Never** **b- Sometimes** **c- Rarely**
Q7: what do you think secondary school students are supposed to be ?	**a- decision makers: they are involved in making a map for the lesson.** **b- decision takers: they have the free will to choose among a list of proposals about what they will to learn.**

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	c- neither decision makers nor decision takers.
Q8:Do you think secondary students are?	**a- Passive: they receive, not produce.** **b- Active: interact and produce.**
Q9: Do you provide your students with tasks that reflect their personal lives and interests?	**a- Yes.** **b- No, I prefer professional content that is not personal.**
Q10: By the end of the session, do you ask your students to give you a feedback of a given type of task if they like it or not ?	**a- Yes.** **b- No, I simply believe that it is what perfectly suits them.**