

1 Teachers' Roles in Autonomous Learning By

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5

6 **Abstract**

7 As Little described, learners' autonomy has been a new term in the field of applied linguistics.
8 It has become one of the objectives of education now. This paper reviews definition and some
9 misunderstanding of learners' autonomy, and discuss the roles of teachers in autonomy.

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11 **Index terms**— learning; autonomy; foreign language learning; teacher, role.

12 **1. Misconception of Learner Autonomy**

13 The concept of learner autonomy has been around for a few years and even become a buzzword within the context
14 of language learning. Unfortunately, it has also been misunderstood as selfinstruction. While it may be true that
15 learners who are able to follow a path of self-instruction successfully may have acquired a high degree of learner
16 autonomy. Some also assume that learner autonomy in the classroom means that the teacher transfers all control
17 to the learners and thus becomes a redundant part of the learning process. Consequently, learner autonomy is
18 often described as a new methodology. However, while the teacher may play a major part in developing autonomy
19 in the learners, this certainly cannot be programmed in any way.

20 **2 II.**

21 Definition of Learner Autonomy ??olec(2001:48) one of the earliest advocates of autonomy in language teaching
22 has defined autonomy as "the ability to take charge of one's own learning". ??ickinson (1987 ?? cited in Gardner
23 & Miller,1996:6) accepts the definition of autonomy as a "situation in which the learner is totally responsible for
24 all of the decisions concerned with his or her learning and the implementation of those decisions"-. Boud suggests
25 that autonomy is "an approach to educational practice" that emphasizes learner's independence and learner's
26 responsibility. ??enny (1999:431) states that autonomy is not only the freedom to learn but also "the opportunity
27 to become a person". These definitions on autonomy can involve learners in taking greater responsibility for what
28 they learn, how they learn, and when they learn. More clearly, Littlewoods (1999:71) identifies autonomy should
29 include the two features:

30 1. Students should take responsibility for their own learning.

31 Author : 730050 (Lanzhou Polytechnic College of Foreign Languages, Lanzhou, Gansu 730050). E-mail :
32 yanhu30@sina.com 2. Taking responsibility involves learners in taking ownership (partial or total) of many
33 processes which have traditional belonged to the teacher, such as deciding on learning objectives, selecting
34 learning methods and evaluating process.

35 **3 III.**

36 **4 Why Autonomy**

37 Today the important aspect of education is to teach students how to acquire knowledge and how to maintain
38 enthusiastic about learning. Language learning, as Thomson (1996: 78, cited by Lee, 1998: 282) puts it, is 'a
39 life-long endeavor'. Learner autonomy can help to achieve high degrees of creativity and independence. The most
40 common notion for autonomy is a goal of education. Fostering a learner's autonomy should be regarded as one of
41 the most important goals that teachers and educators try to pursue. On the other hand, learner's autonomy lays
42 the foundation of lifelong learning. It goes without doubt that to improve students' ability to learn autonomously
43 becomes the duty of every teacher. It is of course possible to apply this idea to English lifelong learning.

7 VI. MISUNDERSTANDING OF TEACHER'S ROLE IN LEARNER'S AUTONOMY

44 5 IV.

45 6 Definition of Teacher's Role

46 Many linguists and scholars have made a great many researches on teacher's role. Ehrman describes teacher's
47 role as "If the classroom is a stage in a theater, and students are actors, what is teacher? The teacher is many
48 people in theater: director, prompter, coach, scriptwriter, audience, and above all, another actor, but they also
49 emphasize different roles from the array. For instance, in traditional teacher-centered methods, the role of director
50 and scriptwriter are especially important, though there are others in more minor parts.(Ehrman and Dornyei,
51 1998:222-223) Wringt (1991) classifies the term such as manager, resource provider, guide, evaluator, organizer
52 and introductory into two major roles of teachers in the classroom:

53 1. to create the conditions under which learning can take place: the social side of teaching.(D D D D) E
54 Year V.

55 Teacher's Role in the Traditional English Language Teaching

56 In traditional language teaching, teachers play more important roles than student in education. In the 1960s
57 and 1970s, there was much reflection in educational writing in western cultures on traditional teacher-directed,
58 examination-oriented and grammar-and-vocabulary-based. The evaluation of a teacher had depended on the
59 amount of knowledge he or she crammed into the students' head: the more, the better. The teacher is a
60 unquestionable knowledge-giver" (Cortazzi and Jin 1996), who dominates the class from the beginning to the
61 end. According to Richards and Rodgers (1986), the teacher acts as the model of language, the lesson planner,
62 the controller of learner practice and the assessor of learner's performance, the organizers in the teaching program
63 in terms of knowledge of grammar, the planners of the course, preparing the materials and deciding what and
64 how learners ought to learn.

65 In these phases, the teachers are definitely the center of teaching, controlling in the whole performance. They
66 control not only the teaching material but also the learning steps of their learners. What is more, teachers are
67 also assessors of the learners' knowledge and performance. In one word, teachers hold the dominant status of
68 teaching and there is no doubt that the teacher is a complete authority and learners appear to follow passively
69 what is taught in a traditional language teaching. This will naturally lead to poor teacher-student interactive
70 relation and unsatisfactory effect of language teaching.

71 As opposed to the traditional role of teachers, in a learner-centered, communicative and autonomous class,
72 the teacher should shift the role from teacher-centered to the learner-centered mode, in which the learner is the
73 centre of the program.

74 Autonomy requires the understanding of new roles between teachers and learners. It is necessary for teachers
75 to change their roles so as to adapt themselves to the new requirement of autonomy. The promotion of autonomy
76 is dependent greatly on how teachers are aware of their new roles.

77 For the learners, they would set their own learning goals, select the learning strategies that suit them best
78 and which are appropriate to their own contexts, and evaluate their progress so that they may become more
79 effective learners and take more responsibility for their own learning. For some teachers, there might be a
80 misunderstanding that learner autonomy would lead to the redundancy of teaching staff because learners are
81 able to do the jobs which formerly belong to their teachers. But in fact, although learner autonomy would
82 help shift the learning/teaching responsibilities from the teachers to the learners, teachers' responsibility should
83 be reinforced rather than reduced. Actually, autonomous learning is not necessarily learning alone, nor is it
84 necessarily learning without a teacher,

85 7 VI. Misunderstanding of Teacher's Role in Learner's Autonomy

87 First of all, it is a misinterpretation that teachers' roles are no longer the part in the autonomous learning
88 process. However, the fact is that teachers play a vital role and their responsibilities can never be ignored.
89 Learner autonomy is based on learner's independence and active attitude towards learning. The learner has the
90 responsibility to make decisions and take charge of their learning. But without teachers' counsel and supervision,
91 the whole process will result in low efficiency or even fall into disorder.

92 Secondly, it is a misconception, pointed out by Little, that self-instruction is often regarded as a synonym
93 of autonomy. However, they are not equivalent. "Self-instruction refers to the situation in which a learner is
94 working alone without the direct control of the teacher". (Dickinson 1987, p.5, cited in Jones 2003) and in the
95 narrow sense, self-instruction is a "deliberate long-term learning project instigated, planned and carried out by
96 the learner alone, without teacher intervention". ?? Benson 2001, p131, cited in Jones 2003) It focuses on whether
97 learning is carried out by the learner alone and excludes the sessions within the taught course. On the contrary,
98 learner autonomy focuses on whether the learning is controlled by the learner. In autonomous learning, learners
99 take their own responsibility for goal-setting, materials selection, learning activities and/or assessment, instead
100 of a teacher or self-study materials being in overall charge (Benson, 2001).

101 **8 VII. Teaches' Role in Learn's Autonomy**

102 In order to foster students' leaning autonomy, teachers need to adapt to perform a variety of roles. Breen and
103 Candline classify the roles of teachers into the following categories: teacher as manager and organizer; teacher
104 as facilitator; The third role is that teacher as counselor. (Richards and Rodgers 1986, p.77) a) Managers and
105 organizers In a learner-centered system the teacher should take the responsibilities of organizing various kinds
106 of activities and games which are appropriate, effective and relevant to the classroom teaching and which will
107 best meet the students' needs and expectations. The ultimate goal is to respond to the students' interests and
108 abilities so that they will be highly motivated to perform in each stage of classroom activities. But the teacher
109 should bear in mind that he or she should give clear instructions as to what is to be done because the(D D D
110 D) E Year

111 success of many activities, no matter whether it is a specific role-play or a group discussion, depends on good
112 organization and on the students' knowing exactly what they are expected to do. Otherwise, it is impossible for
113 the two parts of teaching-learning process to achieve their objective. Teacher's role as manager and organizer is
114 considered to be the first and foremost role teacher has to play in class.

115 **9 b) Facilitator**

116 In order to make the progress more flexible and successful, it is necessary for teachers to serve as a facilitator.

117 **10 i. Features of Facilitator**

118 What are the features of a facilitator in autonomous learning? According to Voller, a facilitator provides psycho-
119 social support and technical support. Psycho-social support refers to the capacity of motivating learner, as well
120 as the ability of raising learners' awareness. Technical support refers to helping learner to plan and carry out
121 their learning, helping learners to evaluate themselves, and helping learners to acquire the skills and knowledge.

122 ii. Teacher as a facilitator: a guide to motivate in learning

123 In focusing on the role of teacher as a facilitator in autonomous learning, this part makes clear that autonomous
124 English learning dose not mean learners simply learn on their own. Learners in the process of becoming
125 autonomous need a teacher to support them in order to reach the highest possible achievement. As facilitators,
126 teachers need to do all the efforts to help make the learning easier and motivate learners to play to the best of their
127 potentials, which includes: helping the learners to plan and carry out their independent language learning; helping
128 learners to acquire the knowledge and skills and motivate learner to learn actively and autonomously. In the
129 process of facilitating, it involves teachers' encouragement and assist. Teachers encourage learners' commitment,
130 helping them to get rid of the uncertainty and anxiety and overcome the obstacles.

131 iii. Teacher as a facilitator: a guide to resource.

132 During the participation in classroom activities, the teacher is expected to be the language resource. It
133 is obvious that the teacher is responsible to ensure necessary language input and to offer help whenever it is
134 needed. During this process, the teacher's first role is to motivate learners to produce their own language and to
135 advisably correct students' errors so as to help students develop their own learning strategies and techniques. As
136 a guide to resource, teachers could also introduce some learning materials as: English magazines and newspapers,
137 some useful websites to learners. In order to motivate learners, teachers should be capable to select the materials
138 which can be used to arouse learners' interest and cater to their learning level so that this ensures the learners'
139 satisfaction and confidence. And thirdly, when the students had difficulty in learning, teachers would get ready
140 to provide information.

141 iv. Teacher as a facilitator: an evaluator to the results It is generally believed that it is another major
142 part of a teacher's job to assess the students' work. Teachers should focus on students' success or progress
143 so that a success-oriented learning atmosphere could be created. At the same time the students will be more
144 confident in autonomous learning. c) Teacher role as counselor Richards and Rodgers (1986, p.78) argued: "The
145 teacher-counselor is expected to exemplify an effective communicator seeking to maximize the meshing of speaker
146 intention and hearer interpretation, through the use of paraphrase, confirmation, and feedback."

147 Teacher as counselor is to give advice and help learners so that they can achieve more efficient learning. This
148 kind of role can be realized by means of helping learners to become more self-monitoring, fulfill learners' aims
149 and needs, as well as give feedback and support learners towards the target of autonomous learning.

150 **11 VIII.**

151 **12 Conclusion**

152 It is not an easy thing to make the students really become the master of autonomous learning. The teachers must
153 shift their roles from a dominator to a director and let the students learn positively. The teacher must believe
154 in the students, respect them and create suitable education, making the class a one of discussion equally and
155 cooperate friendly. The students should act as the role of center under the guide of autonomous learning theory.
156 They learn and study actively under the teacher's instructions. Only when the students enrich themselves,
157 encourage themselves, realize themselves and adjust themselves step by step during the teaching evaluation,
158 can they reach the high efficiency of autonomous learning. During the process of autonomous learning, the

12 CONCLUSION

159 relationship between the teachers and the students is equal, Also, becoming autonomous learning is an ongoing
160 process which takes time, patience and support. Students are in the process of becoming autonomous and are
161 expected to be always autonomous to be lifelong learners. It is the responsibility of the educator to foster this
162 development process of learning.^{1 2}

¹. to impact, by a variety of means, knowledge to their learners: the task-oriented side of teaching."(Wright 1991:51) The description of Ehrman and Dornyei is accurate, vivid and useful in helping teachers to identify and classify their self-concept and preferred teaching style.

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