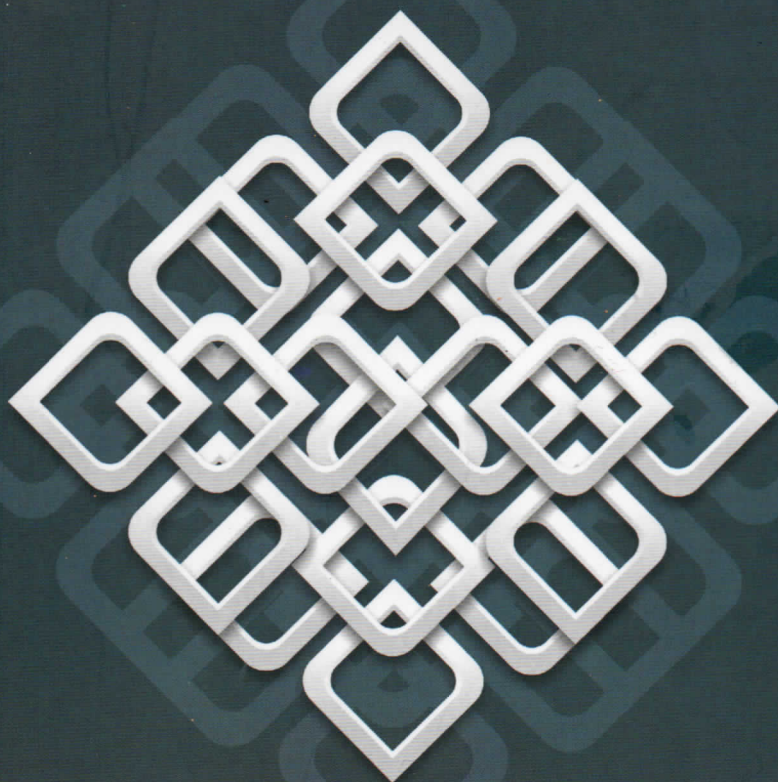


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■ Jurnal Pemikiran dan Kebudayaan Islam



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**SEKOLAH TINGGI AGAMA ISLAM NEGERI
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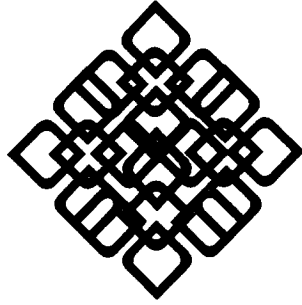
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STRATEGY TRAINING FOR AUTONOMOUS LEARNING AS THE FINAL GOAL OF EDUCATION

Fathor Rasyid*

Abstract

The article is intended to raise awareness and to provide arguments on the significance of Language Learning Strategies (LLSs), strategy training, and learning autonomy. LLSs help language learners participate actively in the realistic communication found in the communicative classroom, and research studies on them have found the significant role of LLS towards the success of language learning. Consequently, strategy training—learning how to learn—providing specific information about why, when, and where strategies should be applied, has been the most successful in language learning and teaching. That is, strategy training promises to improve language learning and leads to learner autonomy as the final goal of education in general. To gain it, stakeholders need to review the implementation of language teaching and learning thus far, so that learning autonomy starts from classroom and continues beyond classroom.

Keywords: Strategy training, Learner Autonomy, Language Planning and Policy, Bilingual Instruction.

Introduction

It is inevitable that learners use different language learning strategies in performing the tasks and processing the new input they

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face. According to Fedderholdt¹, a language learner who is capable of using a wide variety of language learning strategies appropriately can improve his language skills in a better way. Metacognitive strategies improve organization of learning time (time management), self-monitoring, and self-evaluation. Cognitive strategies include the use of previous knowledge to help solve new language problems. Socioaffective strategies include asking native speakers to correct their pronunciation, or asking a classmate to work together on a particular language problem. In short, developing skills in these areas—metacognitive, cognitive, and socioaffective—can help the language learners build up learners' independence and autonomy whereby they can take control of their own learning.

Oxford² states that language learning strategies "...are especially important for language learning because they are tools for active, self directed movement, which is essential for developing communicative competence." Teachers who train students to use language learning strategies can help them become better language learners. Helping students understand good language learning strategies and training them to develop and use such good language learning strategies can be considered to be the key characteristics of a good language teacher.

There are many research studies that have been conducted by teachers as well as educational observers on language learning strategies. Abraham and Vann³ conducted research on strategies used by two language learners: a successful learner and the other unsuccessful. They identified strategies used by the successful learner and ones used by the unsuccessful one. The study found that unsuccessful learners are similar to successful learners in their repertoire of strategies. The unsuccessful learners still appear to be active strategy users, but they often failed to apply strategies appropriately to the task at hand. Apparently, they lacked certain necessary higher-order processes, what are

1 Fedderholdt, Karen, Using diaries to develop language learning strategies. On Internet communication division, Temasek polytechnic on Internet, 1997.

2 Oxford, R. L. 1990. *Language Learning Strategies: What Every Teacher Should Know*. Boston: Heinle and Heinle Pub.

3 Abraham, G. R. and Vann, J, R. Strategies of two language learners: a case study. In Wenden, A., and Rubin, J. (Eds.). *Learner strategies in Language Learning*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall. 1987.

often called metacognitive strategies or self-regulatory skills, which would enable them to assess the task and bring to bear the necessary strategies for its completion.

Oxford and Nyikos'⁴ research can contribute to an important and necessary transformation: changing language learning classrooms into stimulating places where use of communicatively-oriented strategies—for both learning and teaching—will be commonplace. The change may lie not so much in the application of a given method or approach, or in the use of a given textbook, but in promoting a conscious awareness and use of workable strategies within the confines of foreign language classrooms. This change will not be easy; it will involve modifying attitudes and behaviors of learners and teachers alike. Nevertheless, this transformation is essential if students are to obtain the greatest possible benefit from language instruction.

It is apparent that there are many things that we do not know about individual students, yet there are things that we do know about them. In relation to this, Oxford and Crookall⁵ list some points on what we know about our students as follow:

1. Language learners at all levels use strategies.
2. The learner is an active and involved participant in the language learning process.
3. Some/most learners are relatively unaware of the strategies they use and do not take advantage of the full range of available strategies.
4. More proficient learners appear to use a wider range of strategies in a greater number of situations, but the relationship between strategy use and proficiency is complex.
5. Students at higher course levels tend to use strategies somewhat differently from students at lower course levels.
6. Different kinds of strategies often work together for optimal results.

4 Oxford, R and Nyikos, M. variables affecting choice of language learning strategies by university students" *Modern Language Journal*. 1989. (3) 291—300.

5 Oxford, R and Crookall, David. "research on language learning strategies: methods, findings, and instructional issues" in *Modern Language Journal*. 1989. (4) 404—419

7. It is possible and generally advisable to teach learning strategies through completely informed training, in which learners are taught how and why to use, transfer and evaluate strategies.
8. LLS training typically is most effective when it is integrated into regular class activities.

It can be concluded then that language learning strategies help language learners participate actively in the realistic communication found in the communicative classroom. Various metacognitive strategies—especially paying attention and considering the requirements of the task—are instrumental in situations where information must be obtained or shared. Other strategies are useful as well. For example, all compensation strategies help learners overcome inadequate linguistic knowledge by either guessing intelligently via context or by finding ways to express themselves in the absence of the perfect expression. Certain cognitive strategies, such as reasoning deductively and analyzing, aid learners in using logic to understand and produce language. Social strategies, such as asking questions and cooperating, help elicit information and encourage communication. Affective strategies such as positive self talk give learners the courage and determination to cope with and overcome barriers to communication.

Strategy Training

From the research studies reported above, it is clear that language learning strategies are significant to the successful learning of a foreign language. Thus, the logical consequence is the provision of training on learning strategies to language students. The underlying premise for this recommendation is that language learning will be facilitated if students become more aware of the range of possible strategies that they can consciously select during language learning and language use. The view taken is that the most efficient way for learner awareness to be heightened is for teachers to provide strategy-based instruction to students as a part of the foreign language curriculum. A variety of approaches to providing student-directed language learning and language

use strategy instruction are discussed in the research literature.

According to Cohen⁶, when strategy training is included in the instructional package, students can learn how to learn a foreign language while they are learning the language content. Students can improve both their learning skills and their language skills when they are provided with the necessary tools to:

1. self-diagnose their strengths and weaknesses in language learning;
2. become more aware of what helps them to learn the language they are studying most efficiently;
3. develop a broad range of problem-solving skills;
4. experiment with both familiar and unfamiliar learning strategies;
5. make decisions about how to approach a learning task;
6. monitor and self-evaluate their performance; and
7. transfer successful strategies to new learning contexts.

The teachability of LLS was pointed out by Bialystok.⁷ She stated "The comprehensibility of the strategies used by a group of second language learners is an optimistic indication of the ultimate teachability of these strategies." Moreover, Oxford and Nyikos argued similarly that use of appropriate learning strategies enables students to take responsibility for their own learning by enhancing learner autonomy, independence, and self-direction. These factors are important because learners need to keep on learning even when they are no longer in a formal classroom setting. Moreover, cognitive psychology shows that learning strategies help learners to assimilate new information into their own existing mental structures or schemata, thus creating increasingly rich and complex schemata. As they move towards language proficiency, language learners develop their own understandings or models of the second or foreign language and its surrounding culture. Unlike most other characteristics of the learner, such as aptitude, attitude, motivation, personality, and general cognitive style, learning strategies are readily teachable.

6 Cohen, A. D. *Strategies in Learning and Using a Second Language*. England: Longman Limited. 1998.

7 Bialystok, E. *Communication strategies: a Psychological Analysis of Second Language Use*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell. 1990.

To conclude, strategy training providing specific information about why, when, and where strategies should be applied have been the most successful in inducing transfer. Many researchers have noted that strategy training promises to improve language learning and some have argued that it can make learners autonomous.

Learner Autonomy

Benson and Voller⁸ describe autonomy as “the ability to take charge of one’s own learning”. According to them, the term autonomy has been used in at least five ways:

1. for *situations* in which learners study entirely on their own;
2. for a set of *skills* which can be learnt and applied in self-directed learning;
3. for an inborn *capability* which is suppressed by institutional education;
4. for the exercise of *learners’ responsibility* for their own learning;
5. for the *right* of learners to determine the direction of their own learning.

Little⁹ defines learner autonomy as “essentially a matter of the learner’s psychological relation to the process and content of learning ... a capacity for detachment, critical reflection, decision-making, and independent action.” Another definition of learner autonomy is the learner’s willingness and capacity to control or to oversee his or her own learning. That is to say that autonomous learners are those who independently choose aims and purposes and set goals; choose materials, methods and tasks; exercise choice and purpose in organizing and carrying out the chosen tasks; and choose criteria for evaluation.

Although being autonomous is being independent in many aspects, it does not necessarily mean that autonomous learners do not need teachers because learner autonomy is not a teaching method. It is a process from being totally dependent towards being independent.

8 Benson, Phil and Voller, Peter. “Introduction: autonomy and independence in language learning” in Benson, Phil and Voller, Peter (eds) *Autonomy and Independence in Language Learning*. London: Longman. 1997.

9 Little, David. “Autonomy in language Learning”. in Gathercole, Ian (ed) *Autonomy in Language Learning*. London: CILT. 1990.

Understood as a process, not a product, we can see that one does not *become autonomous*; one only *works towards autonomy*. It is something to be achieved by learners, as well as some ways of achieving it. It is through educational experiences that autonomy is learnt. It is for this reason that autonomy is not “teacherless learning”, but it is the teacher’s responsibility to aid students to be autonomous. Yet, it is not easy for teachers to change their role from being purveyor of information to counselor and manager of the learning resources, and of course it is not easy for teachers to let learners solve problems by themselves. Voller¹⁰ identifies three roles of teachers working on an autonomous pedagogy if autonomous learning is to succeed. They are the teacher as facilitator, the teacher as counselor, and the teacher as resource.

Given the importance of developing learner autonomy, it follows that flexible language learning methods should be encouraged. Lamb¹¹ pointed out that there are ten aims of the language curriculum in order to encompass the notion of learner autonomy. Some of them are as follows:

1. To meet individual needs more effectively by allowing for total differentiation, which can involve individualized learning if learners are to be engaged in tasks which are appropriate and at which they can experience success.
2. To create a learning environment where the necessary variety of resources and learning routes can be effectively managed.
3. To achieve this by the development of the learners’ sense of responsibility for their own learning, enabling them to exercise some control over what they do, when and with whom.
4. To develop the metacognitive skills of target setting, monitoring and evaluation, in order to enable learners to diagnose their future language learning needs.
5. To enable the teacher’s time to be used more effectively in order to target specific learning needs in the lesson and to monitor individual progress for summative and formative purposes. By

¹⁰ Ibit.

¹¹ Lamb, Terry. “now you are on your own! Developing independent learning strategies. In Gewehr, Wolf (ed) *Aspects of Modern Language Teaching in Europe*. New York: Routledge. 1998.

releasing the teacher from whole class teaching, she or he can direct attention where it is most needed and free to support and reinforce learning, to monitor and assess, and to encourage the development of cognitive and metacognitive strategies in order to encourage even greater learner autonomy.

6. To improve standards of achievement in language learning. There is a strong indication that the targeting of individual needs with appropriate resources in a supportive and well-organized learning environment does encourage greater success.
7. To develop autonomous language leaning skills in order to enable learners to take advantage of self-access facilities.

Autonomous learners are capable of identifying the objectives currently being pursued by the teacher. They know what to learn and how to formulate their own learning objectives, and they restructure the teacher's objectives to suit their own changing needs. Such learners are able to select and implement appropriate learning strategies, monitor their use of strategies and change them if necessary, and monitor the effectiveness of their learning. This is the characteristic of autonomous learners. It is also a description of some of the strategies that learners can be trained to master.

Strategy Training Towards Learner Autonomy

Some people wanting to learn English frequently ask whether they can master English or not. Others say that they are not talented in learning English. It is the responsibility of teachers to convince them that everybody can master another language. As a matter of fact, nothing is impossible to happen as long as we have high motivation and appropriate ways to gain, and it is through the teaching-learning process that we obtain this "impossibility".

Wenden¹² emphasized the importance of language learning strategies and pointed out that training in LLS will result in learner autonomy. She said, "... one of the leading educational goals of the

12 Wenden, Anita. *Learner Strategies for Learner Autonomy*. UK: Prentice Hall International Ltd. 1991.

research on learner strategies is an autonomous language learner. It is intended that insights derived from the research guide the development of learner training activities so that learners become not only more efficient at language and using second language but also more capable of self-directing these endeavors." It is true that the unsuccessful learners may also use the language learning strategies used by the successful ones; they, however, do not use them effectively, and this is the underlying argument for strategy training. Abraham and Vann¹³ pointed out that the strategies used by the unsuccessful learners are similar to successful learners, but they often fail to apply appropriately to the tasks at hand.

Seeing the importance of LLS towards the success of language learning, it is apparent that *strategy training is the logical consequence*. There are indications that steps can be taken to maximize success. One of the most vital factors is the need for strategy training. That is to say that students need to be aware of the purpose and utility of strategy training, activities should be integrated into language learning tasks, and *students should be encouraged to monitor, evaluate and control their use of strategies*.

Strategies are difficult to learn and even more difficult to transfer to new situations. To make the most of the learning strategies taught, learners must fall into the habit of using them and applying them to new situations. This can only happen once strategies become firmly established. To this end, there is general agreement that in order to guarantee more effective learning, teachers should do the followings:¹⁴

1. Promote learners' confidence in their capacity to become better learners.
2. Motivate students to adopt new strategies and attitudes.
3. Concentrate on one strategy or attitude at a time, do not attempt to teach more than one strategy at a time.
4. Model and explain the new strategies.

13 Abraham, G. R. and Vann, J. R. Strategies of two language learners: a case study. In Wenden, A., and Rubin, J. (Eds.). 1987. *Learner strategies in Language Learning*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall. 1987.

14 Raya, M. J. "Training Language Learners to learn. In Gewehr, Wolf (ed) *Aspects of Modern Language Teaching in Europe*. New York: Routledge. 1998.

5. Explain to the learners why, when, and where to use the strategies.
6. Provide extensive opportunities for practice.
7. Remember that learning how to learn involves a complex of factors and that all must be included in cognitive instruction.
8. Encourage monitoring of new strategies, so that students can gain control.
9. Promote a reflective approach to learning how to learn.

A number of strategy training programs and materials relating to language learning have appeared. All agree on the importance of developing students' metacognitive understanding of the value of learning strategies and suggest that this is facilitated through teacher demonstration and modeling. Also, all emphasize the importance for providing multiple practice opportunities with the strategies so that students can use them autonomously. All, too, suggest that students should evaluate how well a strategy has worked, choose strategies for a task, and actively transfer strategies to new tasks.

Several experts have proposed some patterns of strategy training. However, they have many things in common and can be summarized as follows:

1. *Preparation and assessment.* In this stage, there should be a discussion between the students and teachers about the theme of learning strategies. They identify the learning strategies they are currently using. Students may also be invited to compare their strategies with those of other learners and to assess the relative merits of each. Raya¹⁵ uses the term "reflective awareness" or this stage as the form of obtaining knowledge about oneself and others as learners.
2. *Presentation or modeling.* In this second phase, the teacher describes and demonstrates the use of the strategies so as to make the students know what the strategies are like.
3. *Practice.* This is a very important stage since it is for the students to practice using the strategies, initially with support from the teacher. The teacher is to give the students varied opportunities.

¹⁵ ibit

4. *Evaluation.* After giving practice, students are encouraged to assess the efficacy of the strategies employed on a regular basis, perhaps through diary-keeping or group discussions of strategies employed with different tasks. It is the means for evaluating the effectiveness of individual learning strategies.

As has been argued elsewhere that the final goal of training strategies is to the development of learner autonomy, with learners being encouraged to play an active part in the management of their own learning. With the development of learner autonomy as the driving force, there are some principles that underlie the scheme of work:

1. Learners would need to have full access to the scheme of work, with learning objectives being made quite explicit.
2. Learners would be involved in decision making and would have the power to negotiate when targets are being set, giving them greater control over their own learning. They would thus be encouraged to reflect on why they are doing a particular activity in terms of its relationship to the target, and to evaluate its effectiveness as a learning task.
3. An appropriately wide choice of learning resources and activities would need to be made available to the learners so that their individual needs could be addressed.
4. Learners would need to be involved in the management of these resources and activities in order that they might have access to whether was deemed appropriate, and to remove some of the burden from the teacher who would otherwise be unable to offer such a wide range at any one time.
5. The learning system would need to be 'user-friendly' so that learners and teachers would feel confident about how it works.

Finally, it is important to mention the characteristics of being autonomous, so that being independent is present before students finish their school, if it is possible. The following are the characteristics or capacities of being autonomous adopted from Littlewood¹⁶.

16 Littlewood, W. "Self-access: why do we want it and hat can it do?" in Benson, Phil and Voller, Peter (eds) *Autonomy and Independence in Language Learning*. London: Longman. 1997.

1. Non-dependency on the teacher
 - a. *The teacher's explanation is not considered as the only valid means of understanding.*
 - b. There is no preference for memorizing under the teacher's guidance.
 - c. There is no preference for exercising or speaking the language with the teacher.
 - d. The teacher is not considered as the only valid agent for correcting the form.
2. Non-dependency on the linguistic norm
 - a. Taking risks in making more complex sentences rather than conforming to linguistic models recently learnt.
 - b. Communicating personal meaning in real and unpredictable situations.
3. Need for assessment
 - a. *The need for marking. This has to be interpreted according to the stage in the learning process. The need for marking can be legitimate in a class situation, but if it is accompanied by the feeling that the appreciation on one's level can only take place inside the class and under the teacher's control, then it is a sign of dependency.*
 - b. The nature of the situation considered valid for assessment: whether through a free language activity inside or outside the classroom, or through a controlled class activity under the teacher's guidance.
4. Initiative in learning
 - a. Initiative in the choice of texts or exercises. Students take responsibility for their own learning and apply active, personally meaningful strategies to their work both outside and inside the classroom.
 - b. The need for reading or hearing the language outside what is provided by the method.
 - c. A critical point of view about aspects of the method and possibly about the teacher's behavior.

It can be concluded that strategy training leads to learner autonomy, and there are four criteria of being autonomous. The first is being independent from teachers; students become aware that their teachers are not the sole information and are not the only valid source of information. The second is being independent from linguistic norms, meaning that delivering meanings is more important than forms. Thirdly, students learn not for the sake of passing certain level, not for the sake of their teachers, but they learn for the sake of being able to master a language instead. The last is being independent from classroom in the sense that students do not rely their language proficiency on what they get from classroom. They use personally meaningful strategies outside classroom as well as inside classroom.

Autonomy and Language Classroom

It is not easy for teachers to change their role from purveyor of information to counselor and manager of learning resources. It is not *easy for teacher to stop talking. If they stop talking, it means that they stop teaching*, and if they stop teaching, their learners may stop learning. Similarly, it is not easy for teachers to let learners solve problems by themselves, for that takes time, and there is so much ground to cover. Committing oneself to learner autonomy requires a lot of nerve. In other words, learner autonomy is not easy to achieve, and for that reason it poses a very great challenge to teachers. Yet, it is a challenge that teachers must respond to positively. In general, autonomous learners are defined by the fact that they can integrate what they learn with the rest of what they are. In the case of teaching language as a foreign language, this process of integration means that autonomous learners are users of the language they are learning. It is through autonomy that learners fulfill the communicative aims of foreign language curricula.

It is the purpose of communicative approach that to be efficient communicators in the target language, students must be autonomous to the extent of having sufficient independence, self-reliance to fulfill the variety of social, psychological and discourse roles in which they will be cast. As a consequence for teachers, it is not enough to teach by telling

and showing. They must create the condition in which the learners can learn by doing-by communicating. By doing so, learning activities will lead to a greater degree of active involvement and better learning in actual teaching and learning situation.

Talking about learner autonomy, Nunan¹⁷ proposes five levels for encouraging learner autonomy, and it is summarized on the table below.

Summary of Strategy Training

Level	Learner action	Content	Process
1	Awareness	Learners are made aware of the pedagogical goals and content of the material they are using	Learners identify strategy implications of pedagogical tasks and identify their own preferred learning styles and strategies
2	Involvement	Learners are involved in selecting their own goals from a range of alternatives on offer	Learners make choices among a range of options
3	Intervention	Learners are involved in identifying and adapting the goals and content of the learning programs	Learners modify/adapt tasks
4	Creation	Learners create their own goals and objectives	Learners create their own tasks
5	Transcendence	Learners go beyond classroom and make links between the content of the classroom learning and the world beyond	Learners become teachers and researchers

To summarize, among the most important figures towards the

¹⁷ Nunan, D. "Designing and adapting materials to encourage learner autonomy" in Benson, Phil and Voller, Peter (eds) *Autonomy and Independence in Language Learning*. London: Longman, 1997.

growth of learning autonomy is the teacher. Just as good parenting allows dependence when it is appropriate for a child but encourages independence when the child is ready, so a good teacher provides support as it is needed and lets go when the student is ready "fly alone". In autonomous learning, students are trained to be able to do two things. Firstly, the knowledge to be acquired is defined by the learner or a group of learners on the basis of their communicative aims. These aims consist of the communicative behaviors which the learner believes he will need to master to perform successfully in situations in which he will find himself by describing them in terms of interactive and illocutionary acts, topics and verbal and non-verbal realizations. The learner is able to distinguish between those items which are essential and those which are of no use. Secondly, it is the learner who decides what level of competence he wishes to reach. Finally, in strategy training, it should prepare them to direct the course of their own learning; that is to say, it should take them from their states of varying degrees of dependence to the state of the greatest degree of independence or autonomy, which is possible in a given set of circumstances.

Autonomy Beyond Classroom

A learner who is moving towards autonomous position is someone whose capacity to learn and whose success in learning will be independent of the educational processes taking place in the classroom. Such learners are able to make use of any resources available to them and to seek others from outside the classroom, whatever the teacher does. It is for this reason that we need to set up self access facilities in order to cater learners' individual needs. Individual learners have particular weaknesses which they wish to work on alone or in small groups with similar needs. Learners differ in their learning styles, learning strategies, preferences and so forth in terms of types of activity, and they have particular language requirements. It is also here that principals need to take part in to provide good self-access facilities that will create the opportunity for highly effective individualization of learning. In short, providing self-access facilities is to promote independent learning which involves learners taking responsibility for their own learning and developing effective learning strategies; that is, learning to learn.

In my personal observation, although self-access does not necessarily ensure learner independence, it provides the practical means where learners can take a more active part in determining their own objectives and their own learning programs. Learners may initially be attracted towards self-access because of the opportunity for individualization, but the practical imperative can very naturally entail a more broadly educational imperative, that is, learning to be a better learner. The very practical nature of self-access lends point to learner training and learner development activities which can seem pointless to learners.

To achieve well-developed autonomous condition, Benson¹⁸ provides six approaches to foster autonomy. They are resource-based approaches which emphasize independent interaction with learning materials, technology-based approaches emphasizing independent interaction with educational technology, learner-based approaches which emphasize direct production of behavioral and psychological changes in learners, classroom-based approaches emphasizing learner control over the planning and evaluation of classroom learning, curriculum-based approaches which extend the idea of learner control to the curriculum as a whole, and teacher-based approaches which emphasize the role of the teacher and teacher education in the practice of fostering autonomy among learners.

The Benson's approaches towards autonomy above are very comprehensive involving many elements. In practice, approaches are often combined, sometimes in eclectic ways. Although some claim the effectiveness of one approach to another, it is suggested that, to gain better autonomy, they go simultaneously.

Conclusion

In EFL setting, teachers seem to believe that many students' ability or willingness to work in a self-directed manner outside the class is limited and that this hampers them in several areas. Teachers thus seem to recognize the importance of learner autonomy, even though their

18 Benson, P. "the philosophy and politics of learner autonomy", in Benson, Phil and Voller, Peter (eds) *Autonomy and Independence in Language Learning*. London: Longman. 1997.

comments might suggest that they are not conscious of the need to help students to develop such self-sufficiency. Besides, learning how to learn represents a substantial shift away from rigid study methods towards more experiential and reflective activities which try to involve learners in their own learning and developing process. By implementing learner training, teachers give learners opportunity to reflect and gather their thoughts with regard to the language learning process, something which normally results in improvements in learning efficiency and in higher degrees of motivation for learning. The first half of this chapter is closed by the characteristics of autonomous language learners.

Seeing the continuous decline of English proficiency among Indonesian students should encourage the decision makers to re-plan and reconsider the status of English in Indonesia—making English as the second language where students will get much exposure in English that consequently promotes better learning and, as a result, better proficiency. In addition, school principals as well as teacher should not wait. Instead, they initiate by having at least bilingual instruction which is the starting point to full use of English.

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