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**ENGLISH LANGUAGE INSTRUCTORS' AND LEARNERS' ATTITUDES
TOWARDS LEARNER AUTONOMY AT UNIVERSITIES IN ARMENIA**

A thesis submitted in satisfaction of
the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in
Teaching English as a Foreign Language

by

Lilit Avetisyan

2006



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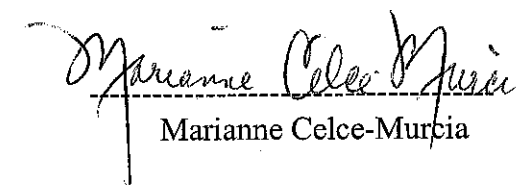
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ABSTRACT

The radical change in the distribution of power and authority in the traditional language classroom is the result of the changes in the curriculum towards a more learner-centered kind of learning. In the new classroom, which is designed to promote learner autonomy, language teachers are able and willing to share instructional responsibilities with their learners, and learners are expected to assume greater responsibility for and take charge of their own learning.

The purpose of this study was to investigate the curricula for English language instruction at five universities in Armenia and find out whether and to what extent they focus on promoting learner autonomy, and what the curriculum features are that teachers support or resist. The study also aimed at investigating these university instructors' and students' attitudes towards learner autonomy and its prerequisites. The subjects of this triangulated investigation were 50 English language instructors (10 from each university) and twenty students (4 from each university) from five universities in Armenia. The data was collected through 5-point Likert-scale questionnaires, teacher semi-structured interviews, and student focus group interviews. The analysis of the quantitative data was done by means of SPSS. The qualitative data was analyzed through transcription and discussed according to certain themes.

The findings of the study revealed that participating instructors are neutral towards the promotion of learner autonomy in their curriculum. The outcomes also showed that the participating instructors' attitudes towards learner autonomy change depending upon the types of facilities they are provided by their universities. Moreover, the findings highlighted that the universities need preparatory programs for learners to become motivated and in-service training for instructors to become up-to-date in teaching. The study also reports pedagogical implications of the study and suggestions for further studies in the field.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT	iii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	iv
TABLE OF CONTENTS	v
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION	1
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW	4
2.1 Introduction	4
2.2 Defining Learner Autonomy	4
2.3 A Brief History of Learner Autonomy	6
2.4 The Need for Autonomy	7
2.4.1 Philosophical Perspective	7
2.4.2 Psychological Perspective	8
2.4.3 Pedagogical Perspective	10
2.5 Approaches to Learner Autonomy	10
2.6 Learner Autonomy in the Curriculum	12
2.6.1 Course Content	14
2.6.2 Selecting Materials	15
2.6.3 Type of Classroom Activities	16
2.6.4 Assessment	16
2.6.5 Position of Desks	18
2.6.6 Seating of Students	18
2.6.7 Discipline Matters	19
2.6.8 Record Keeping	19
2.6.9 Homework Tasks	20
2.6.10 The Time, Place and Pace of the Lesson	21
2.7 The Role of the Teacher in Learner Autonomy	22
2.8 The Role of the Learner in Learner Autonomy	23
2.9 The Present Situation in Foreign Language Learning in Armenia	25
CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY	28
3.1 Introduction	28
3.2 Materials	28

3.2.1 Questionnaire	29
3.2.2 Interviews	29
3.3 Participants	30
3.4 Data Collection Procedure	31
3.5 Data Analysis	31
CHAPTER 4: RESULTS AND DISCUSSION	32
4.1 Introduction	32
4.2 Teacher Questionnaire (Quantitative Data)	33
4.2.1 Sharing Curriculum Responsibilities with Learners	34
4.2.2 Summary	42
4.3 Teacher Interviews (Qualitative Data)	43
4.3.1 Teachers' Profiles	43
4.3.2 Learners' Profiles	45
4.3.3 Sharing Responsibilities with Learners	47
4.3.4 Summary	49
4.4 Learner Interviews (Qualitative Data)	50
4.4.1 Teachers' Profiles	50
4.4.2 Learners' Profiles	52
4.4.3 Sharing Responsibilities with Learners	53
4.4.4 Summary	55
CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION	56
5.1 Introduction	56
5.2 Findings	56
5.2.1 Instructors' Overall Attitudes towards Learner Autonomy	57
5.2.2 Learners' Overall Attitudes towards Learner Autonomy	59
5.3 Pedagogical Implications	59
5.4 Limitations of the Study	60
5.5 Suggestions for Further Studies	61
REFERENCES	63
APPENDICES	67
A. Questionnaire for Teachers	67
B. Interview Questions for Teachers	71
C. Interview Questions for Learners	72

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Over the last two decades, the concepts of autonomy and independence have gained momentum becoming 'buzz-words' within the context of language learning (Little, 1991). More communicatively oriented language learning and teaching has placed a premium on the role of the language learner. It goes without saying that this shift of responsibility from teachers to learners does not exist in a vacuum, but is the result of changes in the curriculum towards a more learner-centered kind of learning. Moreover, this reshaping of teacher and learner roles has been conducive to a radical change in the age-old distribution of power and authority that used to plague the traditional classroom. In this new curriculum, learners are expected to assume greater responsibility for, and take charge of, their own learning (Little, 1991).

Autonomy is the capacity to take control over one's own learning (Benson, 2001). It is the situation in which learners accept the overall responsibility for their own learning (Holec, 1981; Little, 1991). Autonomous learners are viewed as being able to determine their own objectives, define the content and progress of their own learning, select the appropriate methods and techniques to use, monitor their own process of acquisition, and evaluate the outcome of what they have acquired and what they need to learn (Holec, 1981; Little, 1991).

Autonomy is not an article of faith, a product ready made for use or merely a personal quality or trait. Rather, autonomous learning is achieved when certain conditions obtain: cognitive and metacognitive strategies on the part of the learner, motivation, attitudes, and knowledge about language learning. In order for learners to follow certain paths to attain autonomy, there has to be a teacher to show the way. In other words, autonomous learning is by no means "teacherless learning". As Sheerin (1997, p.63) points out 'teachers have a crucial role to play in launching learners into self-access and in lending them a regular helping hand to stay afloat.' Probably, giving students a 'helping hand' may promote learner autonomy, and this is mainly the reason why teachers are reluctant to 'wean students away from teacher dependence' (Sheerin, 1997, p.63). After all, it is not easy for teachers to let learners solve problems for themselves. Such a transition from teacher-control to learner-control is fraught with



difficulties. However, it is mainly in relation to the transition from teacher-control that learner-control finds its expression. This means that learners can take control of their own learning process if teachers are willing and ready to transfer part of their instructional responsibilities to their learners.

Learner autonomy does not mean that teachers become redundant, losing their control over the language learning process. Teachers consciously minimize status differences between themselves and the students. In this new role, teachers are more of a resource person or consultant than an authority; they are facilitators, rather than arbiters, of classroom activities; they are concerned with their own sensitivity to the learners and to their individual differences in learning styles and rates of learning. Above all, they want to train their students to develop their own learning strategies so that students will not be dependent on teachers. This view of where power should reside has led to the emphasis in the literature on autonomy in language learning on learning styles and learner strategies in learner training, on learning 'how to learn', and on the importance of negotiation between learner and teacher (Voller, 1997).

The development of autonomy is pursued in formal learning environments where the learners' involvement in planning, monitoring, and evaluating their own learning supports learner autonomy. The latter enables learners to apply school knowledge and skills to situations in the outside world (Little, 1991). Additionally, involving learners in the management of their own learning and encouraging them to shape it in accordance with their developing and changing interests and needs will motivate learners intrinsically and enhance the effectiveness of their learning process (Little, 1991).

Teachers in an educational system that promotes autonomy should have a clear view of the attitudes and beliefs that underpin autonomous language learning (Voller, 1997). They should take the role of facilitator, counselor, and resource as stages along the road that leads to autonomy. Teachers should acknowledge that language learning is an interpretative process, and that an autonomous approach to learning requires a transfer of control to the learner (Voller, 1997). They should also ensure that their teaching practices are based on a process of negotiation with learners. Finally, they should self-monitor their teaching, observe and reflect upon the teaching strategies they use and the nature of the interactions they set up and participate in (Voller, 1997). For the learners to become more autonomous they should be first involved in the management of their own learning inside the classroom. Through active involvement, learners go through a change from a position of being teacher-dependent to a position of

being an independent learner. For that reason, teachers should be ready and willing to share instructional responsibilities with learners on the basis of negotiation and interaction (Benson, 2001).

The assumption that teachers' willingness and readiness to share their instructional responsibilities with learners and learners' active involvement in the decision-making process of their own learning might enable learners to become autonomous led to the design of the present study. The aim of this study was to investigate whether and to what extent English language syllabi promote learner autonomy at Armenian universities. It also aimed at investigating the attitudes of English language instructors and learners towards learner autonomy.

This chapter introduced the concept of learner autonomy. The next chapter will cover the relevant literature on learner autonomy to show there is a need for investigating this concept within the Armenian context thus establishing a research gap. The third chapter will focus on the methodology and introduce the participants, materials, data collection procedures and data analysis procedures of the study. The fourth chapter will present the results of the study and discuss them. In the final chapter, the findings, pedagogical implications, limitations of the study and suggestions for further research will be discussed.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

The aim of this study is to investigate English language instructors' and learners' attitudes toward learner autonomy at universities in Armenia. In this chapter, the literature relevant to this study will be reviewed. The first section will define and describe the concept of learner autonomy. In the second section, a brief history of learner autonomy will be presented. The following section will discuss the approaches to the development of learner autonomy. The subsequent sections will focus on curriculum considerations, teacher and learner roles in autonomous learning, which form the basis for the triangulated investigation of this study. In the last section, the overall picture of the concept of learner autonomy in Armenia as well as the present situation of foreign language teaching in Armenia will be presented.

2.2 Defining Learner Autonomy

In formal educational contexts, the basis of learner autonomy is acceptance of responsibility for one's own learning. The development of learner autonomy depends on the exercise of that responsibility in a never-ending effort to understand what one is learning, why one is learning, how one is learning, and with what degree of success. The effect of learner autonomy is to remove the barriers that so easily erect themselves between formal learning and the wider environment in which the learner lives (Benson, 2001).

In this definition, autonomy is a capacity for a certain range of highly explicit behaviors that embrace both the process and the content of learning. Essentially, the definition rests on three arguments: (i) learners cannot help but do their own learning; (ii) this being the case, learning will be more efficient when learners are critically aware of goals and methods; and (iii) it is through the development of such critical awareness that learners are empowered to transcend the limitations of their learning environment.



In other words, it is the capacity for self-management in learning (Little, 1991). Little defines autonomy as

... a capacity – for detachment, critical reflection, decision-making, and independent action. It presupposes, but also entails, that the learner will develop a particular kind of psychological relation to the process and content of learning. The capacity for learner autonomy will be displayed both in the way the learner learns and in the way he or she transfers what has been learned to wider contexts. (Little, 1991, p. 4)

Learner autonomy is also defined as the ability that enables learners to have and hold the overall responsibility for their own learning (Holec, 1981). According to Holec, learner autonomy is “the ability to take charge of one’s own learning” (1981, p. 3). He defines learner autonomy in detail as the ability

... to have, and to hold, the responsibility for all the decisions concerning all aspects of this learning, i.e.:

- . determining the objectives;
- . defining the contents and progressions;
- . selecting methods and techniques to be used;
- . monitoring the procedure of acquiring proper speaking (rhythm, time, etc.);
- . evaluating what has been acquired.

(Holec, 1981, p. 3).

Both of these definitions imply that learner autonomy is the situation in which learners have responsibilities and choices concerning their own learning process. Little (1991) and Holec (1981) view autonomous learners as being able to determine their own objectives, define the content and progressions of their own learning, select the appropriate methods and techniques to use, monitor their own process of acquisition, and evaluate the outcome of what they have acquired and what they need to learn. Thus, they know how to accelerate and regulate their own learning.

To further clarify the meaning of learner autonomy, it is important to discuss what it is not. Little (1991) maintains that a number of misconceptions about learner autonomy exist. The first misconception is that learner autonomy is synonymous with self-access learning, self-instruction, distance learning, individualized instruction, flexible learning or self-directed learning. Each of these approaches may promote the development of learner autonomy, but none of them have the same broad meaning as learner autonomy. The second misconception is that learner autonomy means the unconditional freedom of learners. In learner autonomy, freedom is limited by learners’ social relations and requirements (Little, 2001). The third misconception is that control is handed over totally to learners. Only educators can determine the limits of freedom and the responsibility of learners. The fourth misconception is that learner autonomy

entails the isolation of learners. The fifth misconception is that learner autonomy is absolute. There are degrees of autonomy. Thus, achieving complete autonomy should be a goal to be reached. The sixth misconception is that learner autonomy is a new method. In fact, learner autonomy is neither a method, nor an approach. The final misconception is that learner autonomy is a fixed state and that once acquired it can be applied to all areas of learning. On the contrary, it is a hard-won state that must be constantly nurtured and maintained (Benson, 2001; Dam, 1995; Finch, 2000; Little, 1991; Scharle and Szabo, 2000).

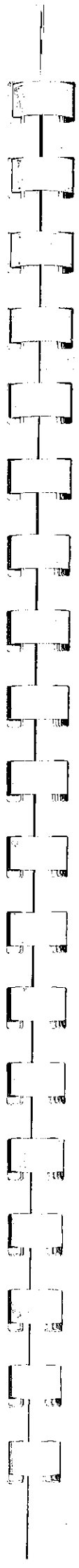
This section presented what learner autonomy is and what it is not. The next section will present the history of learner autonomy in the field of foreign language learning.

2.3 A Brief History of Learner Autonomy

The idea of autonomy in the field of language education originated in the late 1960s from the social and ideological changes taking place in Europe at the time. Since then, learning to learn has become more important, even more important than acquiring knowledge itself (Benson, 2001). The first ideas of autonomy in learning emerged in Holec's 1979 report to the Council of Europe titled "Autonomy in Foreign Language Learning" (Holec, 1981). In this report, Holec argues for 'the need to develop the individual's freedom by developing those abilities that will enable him to act more responsibly in running the affairs of the society in which he lives' (Holec, 1981, p. 1). Holec's project report is a key early document on autonomy in language learning.

The Council of Europe's Modern Languages Project, established in 1971, aimed to provide adults with opportunities for lifelong learning (Benson, 2001). One of the outcomes of this project was the foundation of the Centre de Recherches et d'Applications en Langues (CRAPEL) by Yves Chalon, who is considered to be the father of autonomy in language learning. After his death, the leadership of CRAPEL was passed to Holec, who still holds an important position in the field of autonomy.

Autonomy was seen as a natural product of the practice of self-directed learning, or learning in which the objectives, progress and evaluation of learning are determined by the learners themselves (Benson, 2001). Self-direction was understood as the key to learning languages and to learning how to learn languages. Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, the theory and practice of autonomy in language learning were associated with the ideas of self-access, learner training, and individualisation. These approaches all



aimed to enable learners to become more independent in the way they think, learn and behave. They all focused on the uniqueness of individuals. The spread of self-access over the past three decades, however, showed that there is no necessary relationship between self-instruction and the development of autonomy (Benson, 2001).

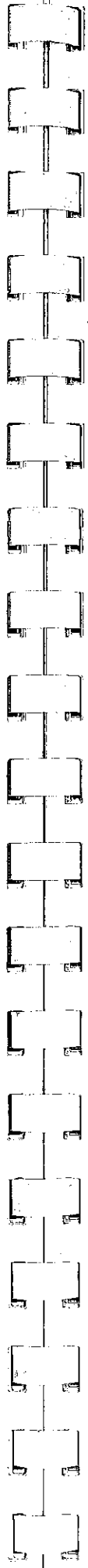
Learner training was another key idea in self-directed learning. As Holec (1980) has pointed out, learner training should enable learners to discover, with or without the help of other learners or teachers, the knowledge and the techniques which they need as they try to find an answer to the problem with which they are faced. Like self-access, learner training has also taken on a life of its own in recent years (Benson, 2001). Individualisation and autonomy are seen as overlapping in as much as both are concerned with meeting the needs of individual learners. However, the early association of autonomy with individualisation has been widely criticised as these two concepts focused on the learner as an individual with distinct characteristics and needs; the learner working in isolation (Benson, 2001). In recent years, researchers of autonomy (Benson, 2001; Little, 1991) have argued that individuality does not mean the isolation of learners, and the development of autonomy necessarily implies collaboration and interdependence.

2.4 The Need for Autonomy

In the context of language education, the more convincing arguments for autonomy are likely to be pedagogical. Yet, we should also recognise that pedagogical decisions in respect to autonomy are often based upon underlying philosophical and psychological assumptions (Benson, 2001). In this section, philosophical, psychological and pedagogical reasons for advocating learner autonomy in language learning will be presented.

2.4.1 Philosophical Perspective

“You cannot teach a man anything; you can only help him find it in himself”(Galileo, p. 23, in Benson, 2001). Galileo, like many other great thinkers throughout the ages, evidently believed in autonomous learning. Rousseau proposed that rather than master preordained subject matter, children should learn what they want to learn when they want to learn it (Benson, 2001). Boyd (1956) explained this by stating that we should not teach the learner science; we should let him discover it. ‘If ever you substitute authority for reason in his mind, he will stop reasoning, and become the victim



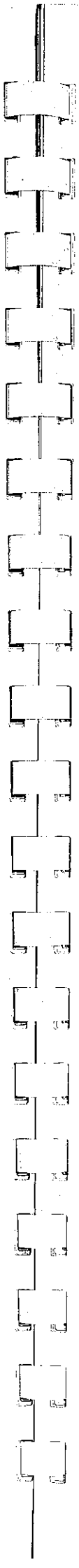
of other people's opinions' (Boyd, 1956, p. 73). The aims of education in a democratic society, thus, go beyond the mastery of the subject matter to preparation for participation in social and political life. In this respect, as early as 1916, Dewey held the view that educational activities should begin from the immediate personal and social experience of the learners in which interaction with the environment generates problems that must be solved in order for individuals to satisfy their needs (Dewey, 1916, in Holec, 1981). Holec (1981) supports Dewey's idea and further states that education should enable people to become producers of society, not just the products of society. Furthermore, the individual has the right to make personal decisions and exercise his or her own choices in learning as well as in other parts of life (Crabbe, 1993). Accordingly, the educational aims should be the learners' rather than those of teachers or administrators (Dewey, 1916, in Holec, 1981).

The starting point to encourage learners to become more autonomous is to have them accept responsibility for their own learning. According to Holec (1981), learners should be given the responsibility to make decisions concerning all aspects of their own learning because they each have their own special learning styles, capacities and needs. Therefore, the starting point for learning must be the learners' needs (Dewey, 1916; Finch, 2000).

2.4.2 Psychological Perspective

The psychology of learning assumes that knowledge is produced through socially conditioned processes of interpretation. It provides strong support for the contention that effective learning begins from the learners' active participation in the processes of learning (Benson, 2001). Learning can only be accomplished by learners. According to van Lier (1996, p.12) "teaching cannot cause or force learning, at best it can encourage and guide learning". Knowledge must be constructed by the learner himself/herself because it cannot be taught (Candy, 1991). Therefore, learning can be associated with the idea that each individual construes the world in different ways and thus learning is an ongoing process of "hypothesis-testing and theory-revision" (Little, 1991, p. 17) as well as constructing and reconstructing knowledge.

In his theory of personal constructs, Kelly (1963) points to the fact that each individual has a unique way of constructing his or her own world. Each generates rules and mental models so that they make sense of experiences. Learning is a search for meaning. Therefore, learning must start with the issues around which students are



actively trying to construct meaning. The key to success in learning depends on allowing each individual to construct his or her own meaning, not to make an individual memorise and repeat another person's meaning. In formal learning environments, learners can be helped to construct their own personal learning spaces in accordance with their personal and educational needs (Benson, 2001; Little, 1991; Schwienhorst, 1997). It seems that if learners are given a share of responsibility in the decision-making processes regarding dimensions such as pace, sequence, mode of instruction, and content of study, learning can be "more focused and more purposeful, and thus more effective both immediately and in the longer term" (Little, 1991, p. 8).

As discussed above, individuality and autonomy mostly overlap. Individuality should not be mistaken for the isolation of learners because learner autonomy favors the interdependence of the individual-cognitive and the social-interactive (Little, 2001). In addition, in his work on developmental psychology, Vygotsky (1978) posits that learning is the product of supported performance and the starting point for learning is social interaction based on learners' prior knowledge and experience. In his theory of 'the zone of proximal development', he makes this assumption explicit and states that the idea of collaboration is a key factor in the development of autonomy. While constructivist tradition mainly stresses the importance of social interaction, Vygotsky argues that

...under the guidance from adults or more experienced peers, children internalize meanings acquired through linguistic interaction as the directive communicative speech of others is transformed into self-directive inner speech.

(Vygotsky, 1978, p. 88)

According to Vygotsky (1978), learners are at the center of learning and learning is a process of making necessary adjustments in accordance with the demands of the problem thus achieving the goal at hand. Similarly, Little (1991) cites Piaget's argument that for the cognitive development of learners, learners need to be provided with activities or situations that engage and require them to adapt, and the process of cognitive development can be facilitated by active problem-solving. Little (1991) points out that according to this view, the child is autonomous in the sense that the stimulus to develop comes from within himself and the process of development is not subject to external control.

2.4.3 Pedagogical Perspectives

If learning is a matter of construction of knowledge, effective learners must be cognitively capable of performing actions that enable them to take control of their learning. Similarly, the capacity to manage one's own learning activities must be grounded in certain cognitive capacities intrinsic to the process of learning (Benson, 2001). "The key idea that autonomy in language learning has borrowed from constructivism is the idea that effective learning is 'active' learning" (Benson, 2001, p. 40). Following these ideas, learner autonomy entails the idea that in formal learning environments, learners should be equipped with "action" knowledge that they can apply in all areas of their life rather than just "school" knowledge (Barnes, 1976, in Benson, 2001, p. 37). The curriculum in formal learning environments, therefore, should enhance students' logical and conceptual growth and be customised to the students' prior knowledge. In addition, curriculum designed to promote autonomy, based on these ideas, should emphasise interaction between learners and learning tasks and emphasise hands-on problem solving (Benson, 2001).

Learner autonomy is based on the idea that if learners are involved in decision-making processes regarding their own learning, they are likely to be more enthusiastic about learning (Littlejohn, 1985). In addition, learners' active involvement in their own learning will lead to a better understanding of the nature of learning and of the requirements of the task at hand. Under such circumstances, learning is likely to be more purposeful and more focused in both the short and long term (Dickinson, 1987; Holec, 1981; Little, 1991). Additionally, the barrier between living and learning that exists in traditional teacher-led educational systems will be minimised so that learning becomes a part of living, and learners then become more useful members of society as well as more effective participants in the democratic process (Little, 1991).

In this section, the philosophical, psychological, and pedagogical reasons for advocating learner autonomy were discussed. The next section will present the approaches designed to promote learner autonomy.

2.5 Approaches to Learner Autonomy

In the literature, there are different approaches to the development of learner autonomy: resource-based, technology-based, learner-based, classroom-based, curriculum-based and teacher-based approaches. Resource-based approaches to learner autonomy include self-access, self-instruction and distance learning. Resource-based



approaches focus on the learners' independent interaction with learning resources by providing learners with opportunities to exercise control over learning plans, the selection of learning materials, and the evaluation of learning. In the resource-based approach, learners are encouraged to develop skills by trial and error as a result of the process of experimentation. Therefore, freedom of choice is fundamental to this approach.

Self-access rooms are physical examples of a resource-based approach to learner autonomy because they provide learners with various learning materials. Learners analyze their needs, set objectives, plan a program of study, choose materials and activities, work without being supervised, and evaluate their own progress (Sheerin, 1997). A resource-based approach is effective in terms of development of learner autonomy because learners are provided with various opportunities to direct their own learning. They are provided with the freedom to develop control over their own individual learning in self-access rooms, but they may not have many opportunities to participate in the collective process of teaching and learning (Benson, 2001; Finch, 2000).

Technology-based approaches to learner autonomy such as computer assisted language learning (CALL) and the Internet focus on technologies that are used to access resources. Technology-based approaches may include student-provided video, computer-enhanced interactive video, electronic writing environments, concordances, informal CD-ROMs, E-mail language advising, and computer simulations. Technology-based approaches are effective in terms of the development of learner autonomy since learners are provided with various opportunities and with the freedom to develop control and direct their own learning (Benson, 2001; Raya and Fernandez, 2002; Robbins, 2002; Schwienhorst, 2003).

Learner-based approaches to learner autonomy focus directly on the production of behavioral and psychological changes that enable learners to take greater control over their learning. Learner-based approaches give importance to strategy training. Learners are given direct and explicit training on language learning strategies and techniques. It is believed that learners who acquire the ability to use strategies flexibly, appropriately, and independently are in effect autonomous. Learner-based approaches are considered to be effective in terms of the development of learner autonomy because they enable learners to take greater control over their learning by directly providing them with the skills they need to take advantage of these opportunities (Benson, 2001; Finch, 2000).

Classroom-based approaches to learner autonomy focus on opportunities learners are provided to enable them to make decisions regarding their learning within a collaborative and supportive environment. Classroom-based approaches are considered to be effective in terms of the development of learner autonomy because learners are involved in the process of decision-making processes dealing with the day-to-day management of their learning.

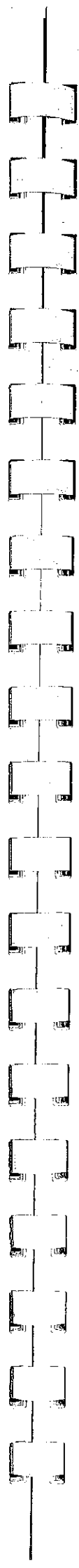
Curriculum-based approaches are effective because learners may develop the capacity for control over their learning through an ongoing cycle of negotiation and evaluation to the extent that curriculum guidelines permit. Learners, as a result of this freedom of choice, may accept more responsibility automatically at an early stage of a course (Benson, 2001; Finch, 2000; Littlejohn, 1985).

Teacher-based approaches to learner autonomy focus on teachers' professional development. Teachers leave their traditional roles and become facilitators, helpers, coordinators, counselors, advisers and resource people. Teachers help learners to plan and carry out their independent language learning by means of needs analysis, work planning, selecting materials and organising interactions. Teachers also help learners evaluate themselves. In addition, they help learners acquire the skills and knowledge needed to implement the above by raising learners' awareness of language and learning, and by providing learner training to help them identify learning styles and appropriate learning strategies (Little, 2004; Wright, 1987, in Benson, 2001).

All the above discussed approaches aim at promoting learner autonomy. The following section provides more detailed information about three of them, the curriculum-based approach, the teacher-based approach, and the learner-based approach, which are the focus of this study and form the basis for the triangulated investigation.

2.6 Learner Autonomy in the Curriculum

Curriculum-based approaches to autonomy are based on the principle of learner control over the management of learning. They imply curriculum negotiation between learners and teachers, where learners are expected to make the major decisions concerning the content and procedures of learning in collaboration with their teachers. As Crabbe states "autonomy as a goal needs to pervade the whole curricular system and not simply be an occasional part of it" (Crabbe, 1993, p.208). In order to achieve a negotiated curriculum, Breen (1987, in Benson, 2001) proposes two major roles of a



syllabus designer: to provide a plan of the decisions to be made and provide a number of classroom activities to facilitate the implementation of the decisions that are made. The negotiated syllabus is an opportunity to enable full learner participation in the decision-making processes associated with selection of content, agreement on procedures, choice of activities and tasks, direction of work and ongoing evaluation (Simmons and Wheeler, 1995). Learners exercise greater control over their learning thus raising awareness of their own learning processes.

The literature on autonomy presents a number of autonomous learning models in which high intermediate level learners have taken responsibility for decision-making at the level of the curriculum as a whole. The Denmark model is based on reflection, self-evaluation and negotiated curriculum management. It emphasises collaborative work and the processing of authentic samples of target language input gathered from outside the classroom into creative written and spoken output to be shared with the class (Benson, 2001). The Thailand model focuses on the learners and what they actually want to say; tasks and content are often largely determined by the students themselves; the focus is on process where the outcome of each week's work forms a major input to that of the following. Learners build up understanding and practice, as a result of which they become self-critical and confident (Benson, 2001). The Finnish model involves the notion of a curriculum that is largely determined and evaluated by the students. The emphasis is on reflection and learners awareness of their own use of strategies and planning (Benson, 2001).

The fact that these models have been judged successful is some evidence of the effectiveness of curriculum-based approaches. They develop learners' capacity for control over learning, address their freedom and responsibility, support learners in decision-making processes, and emphasise the development of self-management skills, and control over cognitive and content aspects of learning. The learners' active involvement in decisions concerning their own learning may support better learning because learning can be more focused and purposeful for learners (Benson, 2001; Dam, 1995; Little, 1991; Nunan, 2004; Wenden, 1991). Additionally, involving learners in the decision making process may help them feel ownership over their own learning so that they may accept undertaking some additional responsibility for their own learning (Benson, 2001; Holec, 1981).

Camilleri (1997) proposes ten considerations that include the course content, selection of materials, type of classroom activities, assessment, position of desks, seating

of students, discipline matters, record keeping, homework tasks, and the time, place and pace of the lesson. Each consideration will be discussed in a separate subsection.

2.6.1 Course Content

It is important to understand how to determine the course content to promote learner autonomy. Involving learners in decisions concerning course content and giving them a share of responsibility for planning and conducting teaching-learning activities may lead to better learning (Dam, 1995). In formal learning environments, the first thing to note is the uniqueness of learners (Brown, 2000; Dam, 1995). Learners' individual differences and individuality should be fully acknowledged because this may give learners a sense of belonging and a sense that they are responsible for their own learning (Little, 2004).

A course developed to promote learner autonomy should include three principles of learner autonomy - 'learner empowerment, target language use and reflectivity' (Little, 2004, p. 119). In other words, course content should engage students in the business of learning and necessitate that they use the target language so that learners may develop an understanding of the nature of the target language as well as how they learn. As a result, students may discover reasons for learning and using the target language (Little, 2000).

Learner autonomy encompasses the idea that learners need to establish a personal agenda to make their own learning more meaningful and purposeful. For that reason, the content of their own learning should be related to their needs and interests and thus be achievable by them (Little, 1994, in Benson, 2001). Learner reflection enables learners to develop an understanding of their knowledge and attitude towards their language learning process.

A course should provide learners with choices that meet their precise learning needs. However, providing learners with choices may be difficult because some classes may be overcrowded, physical conditions in the classroom may not be appropriate, the curriculum may not be flexible, the administration may not be tolerant, students may not be willing to learn, and courses may be more exam-oriented than learning-focused (Brown, 2001). In such cases, teachers may have to act as both technicians and diplomats, and be ready to endure hardship (Brown, 2001). Consequently, in institutional contexts, in order for learners to have control of content for their own learning, first and foremost, the curriculum may have to be designed in such a way that

teachers and learners have the flexibility to develop their own capacity to participate in social interactions. Also, teachers may need to create situational contexts in which learners can determine the topics and tasks (Benson, 2001).

2.6.2 Selecting Materials

Learner autonomy posits that learners can develop an understanding and capacity to decide what materials may assist them in reaching their learning goals. Learners need teachers' guidance and special expertise in choosing and developing appropriate materials. The primary concern for both teachers and learners is to select materials that can give rise to learners' individual learning processes (Dam, 1995; Little, 1991; Littlejohn, 1985).

Learners need more linguistic input than teachers can possibly provide orally. For instance, they need dictionaries for words and grammars for rules; they need authentic texts that are produced in the target language community for some purposes other than language learning to give them themes and models (Little, 2000). For this reason, they should be provided with access to as wide a range of materials as possible, such as written and audio-visual data, reference books, including dictionaries and grammars, newspapers and magazines, and learner-designed material. Additionally, they should be encouraged to use learning materials on their own in accordance with their individual needs and interests (Dam, 1995; Finch, 2000; Little, 1991).

Most learning in formal environments is based on a coursebook and the selection of the coursebook necessitates the teacher's special expertise (Little, 1994; Littlejohn, 1985). Learner autonomy requires that coursebooks should be chosen with care and teachers should be ready to complement them with extra materials to enable learners to make a connection between the "new knowledge that the coursebook presents and the knowledge that learners already possess" (Little, 1994, p. 439). Moreover, extra materials that are presented through texts with topics already familiar to learners may make it easier for learners to boost their linguistic knowledge (Little, 1994).

Learner-selected and learner-designed materials, such as journals, posters, texts of various kinds, provide clues to the teachers about the learners' preferences, interests and needs. Additionally, teachers may learn more about the classroom process from learner products. These materials may also help learners monitor their progress and evaluate it. Therefore, a combination of learner-selected and teacher-selected materials in foreign language classes is appropriate (Dam, 1995; Little, 1991).

2.6.3 Type of Classroom Activities

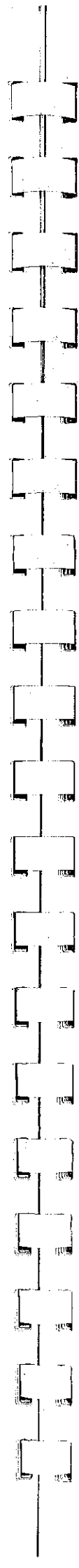
In an autonomous classroom, to help learners develop a feeling of ownership over their learning, learners are given a certain amount of control over the type of classroom activities they participate in (Brown, 2001). In classrooms in which learner autonomy is a desired goal, there are many different activities with different content and varied topics because learners' needs and interests are naturally unique. Following the curricular guidelines, a variety of activities requires learners to be active in the classroom (Dam, 1995). Teacher-talk is reduced to a minimum as learners work in groups, do role plays, fill in charts or grids, give their personal opinions using target language, and generally engage in more oral work (Dam, 1995; Littlejohn, 1985; Wenden, 1991).

Learner autonomy favors pair and group work over individual work in the classroom because pair and group work develop learners' capacity to use the target language as a medium of communication (Little, 1994). In addition, learners learn how to talk to negotiate meaning, convey a message and listen for a reason to establish solid links between the classroom and the world outside the school and improve their social abilities as well as their proficiency levels (Brown, 2001; Little, 2004; van Lier, 1996).

Littlejohn (1985) argues that the type of classroom activities designed to promote learner autonomy should be carefully chosen and taken from real life. These activities should also be stimulating and based on situations in which learners may actually need to use English. This will enable learners to use learning strategies and thus build bridges between the classroom and the world outside the classroom (Brown, 2001).

2.6.4 Assessment

Assessment plays an important role in any educational program because assessment and evaluation, whether traditional or alternative, provide teachers with feedback to make decisions about their students. Traditional and alternative assessments differ from each other in terms of promoting learner autonomy. Little (2003) points out that formal types of assessment may work counter to the promotion of learner autonomy if they strictly predetermine the content of learning, materials to use, and learning activities. In addition, exams may make learners exam-oriented and may also limit learning because exams cause a separation between day-to-day living and learning (Brown, 2001; Dam, 1995; Little, 2003).



Alternative assessment approaches require learners to show what they can do, what they are able to recall and produce. Alternative assessment, according Huerta-Macias (1995), is used to gather information about how students are approaching, processing, and carrying out real-life tasks in a particular field.

Dam (1995) argues that assessment and evaluation require time, reflection and honesty on the part of both learners and teachers in an atmosphere of trust and respect. Reflection on what is learned and how it is learned can make learners more effective because they may become more aware of their strengths and attitudes towards language learning. Reflection, as a part of self-assessment, motivates learners and enables them to set more realistic learning goals in the language learning process (Benson, 2001; Little, 2003).

Self-evaluation and self-assessment are key concepts in learner autonomy because these activities can facilitate autonomy in language learning. Through self-evaluation and self-assessment, learners can monitor and reflect on the effectiveness of their own learning progress. Additionally, they can revise their learning goals, objectives, learning processes and the products based on their own feedback from their perceptions and goals. Learners can also relate learning to their individual learning needs, and thus develop a basis of experience and awareness to use in planning for future activities (Brown, 2001; Little, 2003).

Because self-assessment enables learners to make some judgements about the effectiveness of their learning performance, the notion of self-assessment is desirable for the promotion of learner autonomy (Dickinson, 1987). Learners should be encouraged to self-assess themselves rather than be tested because self-assessment “enables learners to undertake more responsibility regarding their own learning, identify their weak and strong areas as well as effective language learning strategies and materials, establish more realistic learning goals, and help them to become more motivated and goal-oriented” (McNamara and Deane, 1995, in Benson, 2001, p.158).

Self-assessment can actually promote learning because it raises learners’ awareness and encourages them to think critically and reflect on their own competence. Self-assessment provides teachers with richer and fuller profiles of learners’ needs, learning progress, and competencies. Moreover, self-assessment enables and encourages learners to share the responsibility of assessment with teachers.

Learners can be trained how to self-assess. Additionally, teachers should be ready to provide learners with guidance and support so as to help them develop self-

assessment skills. A drawback of self-assessment may be that self-assessment for young learners may be challenging because they may have little or no experience or knowledge regarding learning (Kohonen, 2000).

A number of alternative assessment types developed to meet the needs of a variety of classroom contexts have been presented in the literature. The most common examples of these alternative assessment tools are as follow: assessment portfolios, journals, logs, conferences, interviews, discussions, oral reports, project works, checklists of students' behaviors/products, and video recordings (Brown, 2001).

2.6.5 Position of Desks

When deciding on the layout of a foreign language classroom, teachers need to take many factors into account, such as the mobility of the desks, the number of students, the content of tasks, classroom activity, proficiency level and age of the students.

To support the development of learner autonomy, desks need to be arranged to take students' focus off the teacher and the blackboard as the center of attention (Brown, 2001). Therefore, desks, if they are movable, can be rearranged in a U-shape so that students do not face the teacher and the blackboard. However, frequently this is not possible because the desks cannot be moved or the classroom is overcrowded so teachers and learners may have to accommodate to existing physical conditions (Brown, 2001; Dam, 1995; Wenden, 1991).

2.6.6 Seating of Students

In formal learning environments, activities such as pair work and group work necessitate that teachers make decisions related to the seating of students. Teachers may use their authority and decide who is going to sit next to whom either alphabetically, randomly or based on students' preferences and characteristics. However, in order for learners to feel they have control over their own learning and learning environments, they should be able to make such decisions for themselves because learners naturally fall into a comfortable pattern of self-selection (Brown, 2001). Additionally, by letting students choose for themselves, teachers show respect for learners' decisions, thereby supporting the promotion of learner autonomy. However, if a teacher feels the need for a different arrangement because of some discipline matters or unacceptable behavior of

students, teachers may naturally follow a different arrangement (Brown, 2001; Dam, 1995).

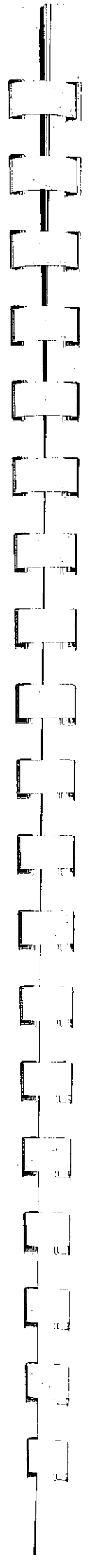
2.6.7 Discipline Matters

In every classroom there needs to be a range of rules that determine what students can and cannot do. In order for learners to feel ownership over their learning contexts, they can be encouraged to formulate classroom and group rules through negotiation (Brown, 2001; Dornyei, 2001). Dornyei (2001) believes that if learners are actively involved in determining the classroom and group norms, they naturally tend to abide by these rules without teachers' having to exercise their authority. In case of a disciplinary problem learners are likely to be able to cope with such deviations themselves. Teachers also need to be steady in their control and pay enough attention to the enforcement of the established norms. However, for learner autonomy to be implemented, teachers should respect the learners and be very careful not to control the classroom too much because learner autonomy is dependent upon learners' being actively involved in all aspects of their learning (Brown, 2001; Dornyei, 2001).

2.6.8 Record Keeping

Learners can be encouraged to keep records concerning their learning progress by keeping records of work completed, marks earned, and class attendance. Keeping records entails reflection and thus helps learners accept responsibility for their own learning and then act on that responsibility. Keeping records also helps learners develop metacognitive control of the learning process and raises their conscious awareness of the target language (Dam, 1995; Little, 2000).

Learner autonomy requires self-reflection on the part of learners and the capacity for reflection grows out of this practice (Little, 2000). Through record-keeping learners may develop an awareness of what their strengths and weaknesses are, what they have acquired, what more they need, and what learning strategies work well for them. Through record keeping, learners can also share their ideas with their teachers and other classmates. Learners thus may learn from their mistakes as well as those of their peers. Through learners' records, teachers may follow the work of an individual or group of learners, and discover learners' interests, learning styles, favorite learning activities, past



experiences, attitudes toward learning the foreign language, their strengths and weaknesses and needs (Benson, 2001; Scharle and Szabo, 2000; Wenden, 1991).

The process and outcome of record keeping necessitates learners' reflection on learning goals, plans, activities, outcomes, and gains. These can be recorded on posters or in learners' individual diaries or logbooks. These records help learners keep track of the work undertaken, the activities conducted, and new words or expressions they used (Dam, 1995; Wenden, 1991). By means of diaries or logbooks, learners may also evaluate how well the individual and group work progressed and how the group worked. Consequently, they may gradually develop a capacity for metacognitive control of the learning process thus nurturing their intrinsic motivation (Dam, 1995; Little, 2000; Scharle and Szabo, 2000; Wenden, 1991).

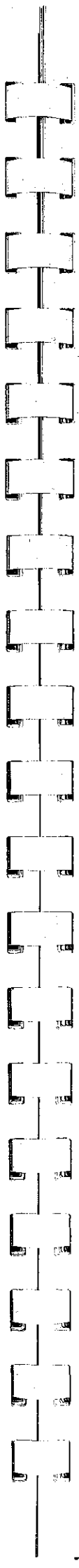
Dam (1995) mentions the preparation of posters as useful materials for both learners and teachers to keep records of work done inside and outside the classroom. By means of posters, learners not only keep records of work accomplished, but also the posters illustrate their ideas, plans, perhaps their favorite proverbs and drawings. Learning therefore becomes a part of their lives. Thus, posters make teaching and learning processes visible.

2.6.9 Homework Tasks

Homework tasks play an important role in the development of learner autonomy because for the development of learner autonomy, learners should use the target language for extended periods of time in the world outside the classroom (Little, 1994). Homework tasks require additional practice on the part of learners. Homework tasks also have learners search for opportunities for practice and reflect on their own learning based upon corrective feedback from their teachers or peers.

Homework tasks can prove to learners that English is not limited to the classroom because language from the outside world may be taken to the classroom to investigate and work with. Moreover, things that have been covered in the classroom may be used outside the classroom. Also, homework assignments urge learners regularly to step back from the process of learning and reflect on how well they did as a group or as an individual (Benson, 2001; Brown, 2001; Dam, 1995; Scharle and Szabo, 2000; Wenden, 1991).

Homework tasks can take many forms, depending upon such factors as the age of learners, the level of proficiency they have already achieved in the target language, the



size of the class, and the availability of technical and other support. To foster autonomy, homework tasks should be related to things learners are personally involved with or interested in and something they can manage on their own. Therefore, learners should be involved in the process of determining the content of homework assignments. For instance, teachers can present a list of ideas or ask learners to list the topics they would like to work on and subsequently ask them to choose one (Brown, 2001; Little, 1994). In other words, teachers should be open to negotiation on the quantity, type and frequency of homework tasks (Brown, 2001; Dam, 1995; Wenden, 1991).

2.6.10 The Time, Place and Pace of the Lesson

To encourage learners to take some of the initiatives that help them shape their own learning process, they should be considered as equal partners and through the process of interaction they thus should be given an opportunity to decide on the time, place and pace of the lesson (Dickinson, 1987; Little, 1994).

In formal learning environments, the degree of control of the classroom time may increase or decrease depending upon the proficiency level of the students, the nature of the classroom activity, and the content of the learning material (Brown, 2001). For example, for beginning level students, class-time, place and pace of the lesson is usually teacher-controlled. Teachers may also take more control over the topics, tasks, activity types, time-on-task, and what to focus on based on the learning materials. As the proficiency level of students increases, control may be handed over to the learners gradually in terms of time, place and pace of learning (Benson, 2001; Dam, 1995; Scharle and Szabo, 2000; Wenden, 1991).

In the negotiation of learning objectives and procedures, the teacher's role is crucial. Curriculum-based approaches do not imply an abdication of the teacher's role (Benson, 2001). On the contrary, as in all approaches to the implementation of autonomy, the attitudes, skills and dedication of the teacher are key factors.

Having described curriculum in learner autonomy and aspects of classroom management and lesson methodology, the next section turns to the role of the teacher in learner autonomy.

2.7 The Role of the Teacher in Learner Autonomy

The role of the teacher within autonomous learning, as opposed to the traditional role, is characterised by the terms facilitator, helper, coordinator, counselor, adviser, and resource. Voller (1997) describes the teacher as a facilitator who provides support for learning; a counselor who emphasises one-to-one interaction; and a resource who serves as a source of knowledge and expertise. The teacher's role is to set up dialogues in which learners recognise their state of knowledge (Wright, 1987, in Benson, 2001). They help learners to carry out their independent language learning by means of needs analysis (both learning and language needs), objective setting (short- and long-term), work planning, selecting materials, and organising interactions. In addition, teachers help learners evaluate themselves (by assessing initial proficiency, monitoring progress, and peer- and self-assessment). Lastly, teachers help learners acquire the skills and knowledge needed to implement the above by raising learner awareness of language and learning, and by providing learner training to help them identify learning styles and appropriate learning strategies (Little, 2004; Voller, 1997).

Learner autonomy actually starts with teacher autonomy in formal teaching environments. The promotion of learner autonomy demands continuous awareness and discourse skills from teachers (Little, 2004). It is not just a matter of changing teaching techniques, it is a matter of changing teacher personality (McGrath, 2000). Teachers who are caring, supportive, patient, tolerant, empathetic, open, and non-judgmental may more easily encourage learners to share responsibility for their own learning. Teachers also help by encouraging commitment, dispersing uncertainty, helping learners overcome obstacles and conversing with learners to support learner autonomy. Teachers need to avoid manipulating, interfering, and controlling learners to motivate them. Teachers can also raise learners' awareness by explicitly calling attention to preconceptions about learner and teacher roles, thereby helping learners perceive the utility of, and necessity for, autonomous learning (Dam, 1995; Little, 2004; Wenden, 1991; Wright, 1987, in Benson, 2001).

In order to foster autonomy among learners, teachers must be both free and able to assert their own autonomy in the practice of teaching. Before negotiating with learners teachers must decide on the areas in which they will seek to promote learner autonomy. They must decide whether, and to what extent, it is possible for learners to determine their own learning objectives, select their own learning materials and assess their

learning process (Little, 1995, in Benson, 2001). In other words, autonomy among learners develops in part as a product of the teacher's assessment of the capacities and preferences of the students. Teacher autonomy can therefore be understood in part as the recognition of one's own professional freedom in the implementation of curriculum guidelines (Benson, 2001).

Learner autonomy is based on the idea that teachers teach learners how to learn. Therefore, teachers first recondition learners while assisting them to develop a conscious awareness of their language learning strategies and their effectiveness, and their beliefs about the language learning process. Additionally, teachers train learners to gradually become more active, reflective and critical thinkers in using learning strategies for their own learning as well as encouraging them to initiate experimental practice inside and outside the classroom. Moreover, teachers involve learners in the decision-making process. Teachers encourage learners to set up reachable learning goals based on the feedback from evaluation and self-assessment (Dam, 1995; Little, 1998; Wenden, 1991).

2.8 The Role of the Learner in Learner Autonomy

Learner autonomy is achieved through learner development, which is defined as cognitive and affective development that enables learners to take greater control over their learning. Research evidence (Chamot and Rubin, 1994; Cohen, 1998; Rees-Miller, 1994) suggests that explicit instruction in strategy use can enhance learning performance. It does not, however, show that it is necessarily effective in enabling learners to develop the capacity for autonomous learning. This implies that the behavioral and psychological changes within learner development should involve developing capacity, heightening awareness of oneself as a learner, and increasing willingness and ability to manage and reflect upon one's own learning. The combination of these three aspects of control appear to be more effective in fostering autonomy (Benson, 2001).

There seems to be general agreement that autonomous learners are those who accept responsibility for their own learning (Dam, 1995; Holec, 1981; Little, 1991). This acceptance of responsibility is not a single act but a gradually developing state of mind. Learners become aware of their personal and educational needs and can determine the objectives and goals for their own learning. Also, they can establish a link between what is to be learned, how to learn this, and the resources available. They develop a capacity

2.9 The Present Situation of Foreign Language Learning in Armenia

English language learning cannot be realised effectively only within the classroom. It requires greater individual work and responsibility on the part of the learner. Therefore, language learners need to be ready to study the language independently whenever the need arises. In other words, learners need to take greater control of their own learning, that is to become autonomous.

Autonomy is available to all, although it is displayed in different ways and to different degrees according to the unique characteristics of each learner and each learning situation (Benson, 2001). Learners who lack autonomy are capable of developing it given appropriate conditions and preparation. The conditions for the development of autonomy include the opportunity to exercise control over learning. The ways in which teachers organise the practice of language teaching and learning therefore have an important influence on the development of autonomy among language learners. In order for learners to become autonomous, they need to take up more of the skills and insights that have traditionally been assigned to teachers (Sturtridge, 1997). This implies that learners need to learn how to analyse and identify their language-learning needs and objectives; how to choose appropriate learning activities, techniques and materials; how to organize a realistic and relevant learning program; and how to monitor and evaluate their progress (Riley, 1997). All these skills and insights help learners take on more responsibility for their own learning, which can be beneficial because they learn what they are ready to learn, they can carry on learning outside the classroom, and they can transfer learning strategies to other subjects (Esch, 1997). These benefits of autonomous learning have led to the development of autonomy as a legitimate and desirable goal of education.

The Armenian education system is mostly defined as traditional with the focus on the teacher. The Armenian classrooms are generally teacher-centered classrooms where patterns of interaction generally involve teacher-student and the limited level and nature of student talk. Approaches to reading, speaking practice, use of technology, use of classroom materials all merit the description of 'traditional' (Gasparyan, Harutunyan, Khanzatyanyan, Khondkaryan, Muradyan, 2005).

In Armenia recitation is a common mode of teaching in both the primary and secondary educational systems. The majority of learners undergo the process of learning through traditional educational methods in which the teacher is the 'authority' rather

than the 'facilitator'. The teacher-student relationship is mainly limited to one-way channels of communication in which teachers transfer information to learners. The assessment of learner performance is generally product-oriented rather than process-oriented, mainly a summative evaluation in the form of exams that are based upon learners' memorization of information they have learned during their course of study.

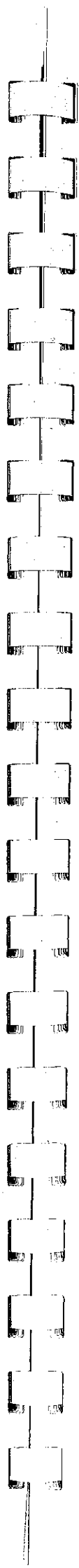
Traditional schools are rule-bound institutions where virtues such as independence, individuality and creativity of students are not valued equally with virtues such as diligence, obedience, conformity and discipline. In most schools in Armenia, learners are trained to adopt dependent behavior, which may be difficult to recondition. Because teachers are also educated in the same Armenian educational system, where the teacher is the main authority in the classroom, it might be difficult for them to change their teaching strategies in a short period of time.

Very often, English language instructors complain about low student motivation and low participation in the lesson. The reason may be that learners are not involved in decision-making processes for their own learning. It is the teacher's role to share instructional responsibilities with learners in accordance with learner autonomy, which is likely to enhance the level of learner motivation and participation and positively influence their attitudes towards their foreign language learning.

In brief, the educational system in Armenia can be described as traditional, teacher-dominated, and authority-oriented in which expository and didactic teaching methods are common. Additionally, schools are mostly rule-bound places in which independence, individuality and creativity are less favored than obedience, conformity, discipline and diligence. As a result of the competitive examination system in Armenia, Armenian learners are mostly syllabus dependent, passive, exam-oriented, and do not volunteer to take initiative.

Teachers can play an important role in supporting change in the educational system toward greater learner autonomy. As learner autonomy supports the development of individuality and learning choices, how much teachers know about it is crucial. However, in Armenia very little research has been done to investigate foreign language instructors' attitudes towards learner autonomy.

This study was prompted by the assumption that English language instructors in Armenia might consider certain aspects of teaching and learning more suitable than others for the promotion of learner autonomy in their teaching contexts. The purpose of the study is to investigate the English syllabi in different universities in Armenia, to find



out the attitudes towards learner autonomy among English language instructors and language learners. The following research questions were formulated:

1. Do the English language syllabi at the five Armenian universities studied make students' involvement possible in decision-making processes for their own learning, and to what extent?
2. What are the attitudes of English language instructors working at the five universities towards sharing responsibility with their students to promote learner autonomy in their classes?
3. What are the attitudes of English language learners studying at the five universities towards becoming more autonomous learners?

This study will reveal whether and to what extent the curricula in the Armenian state universities promote learner autonomy, whether language instructors are ready and willing to implement a curriculum designed to promote learner autonomy, and which areas they perceive are more suitable for enhancing learner autonomy. It will also reveal language learners' perceptions about learner autonomy in their classes. All the findings of the study will provide useful information for curriculum planners and administrators who are planning or revising their syllabi so as to implement and promote learner autonomy in their teaching contexts. The findings will also show what is necessary to prepare students both psychologically and practically for independence so that they leave their institutions armed with confidence, knowledge about their own learning, and an understanding of how to select and make use of their learning styles and strategies. Where there is no teacher, the good learner is someone who teaches himself well and becomes a 'learner-teacher' (Sturtridge, 1997). Thus prepared, students will be ready to study the language independently whenever the need arises.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

To address the research questions presented in Chapter Two the present study was set up to investigate whether and to what extent English language syllabi at Armenian universities promote learner autonomy, and the attitudes of English language instructors and students towards learner autonomy. The underlying assumption was that learner-centered language syllabi, language teachers' willingness to share instructional responsibilities with their learners, and students' readiness to assume greater responsibility for and take charge of their own learning would promote learner autonomy in the classroom. The research questions are repeated here for ease of reference.

1. Do English language syllabi at the five Armenian universities studied make students' involvement possible in decision-making processes for their own learning, and to what extent?
2. What are the attitudes of English language instructors working at the five universities towards sharing responsibility with their students to promote learner autonomy in their classes?
3. What are the attitudes of English language learners studying at the five universities towards becoming more autonomous learners?

This chapter is composed of four sections. In the first section, the materials and instruments used for the study will be presented. In the second section, the participants of the study will be described. The third section will provide detailed information on data collection procedures. The final section will discuss how the data collected was analysed.

3.2 Materials

In order to obtain data to answer the research questions, a triangulated investigation was conducted. The data was collected through a teacher questionnaire on

learner autonomy, semi-structured teacher interviews, and interviews with student focus groups. Each instrument will be discussed in detail.

3.2.1 Questionnaire

The teacher questionnaire (see Appendix A) consisted of nine main questions designed to investigate to what extent English language syllabi at the participating universities in Armenia allow language learners to be involved in making decisions on the course objectives, course content, material selection, type of classroom activities, type of homework tasks, time, place and pace of the lesson, classroom management, record-keeping, and self-assessment. The questionnaire provided options on a five-point Likert scale, with 'not at all', 'a little', 'considerably', 'a lot', and 'greatly' options for each question, also a space for comments after each question. It also included a consent form informing participants that the questionnaire was voluntary and confidential. Because the respondents were English language instructors, the questionnaire was in English.

The questionnaire was adapted from Camilleri's (1997) study 'Learner Autonomy: the Teacher's Views'. The original study investigated teachers' attitudes towards learner autonomy. The study was based on the idea that teachers may consider certain aspects of teaching and learning a foreign language to be more suitable than others for the implementation of learner autonomy.

For the present study several changes were made in the questionnaire. Since a focus of the research was to find out whether and to what extent English language syllabi at universities in Armenia promote learner autonomy, necessary adaptations were made in the type of questions. For example, the question "How much should the learner be involved in making decisions on the objectives of a course of study?" was changed into "To what extent is the learner involved in making decisions on the objectives of a course of study you are teaching?"

3.3.2 Interviews

Face-to-face semi-structured interviews were conducted with 10 volunteer English language instructors (2 instructors from each university) to follow up on specific information from the questionnaire (see Appendix B). The aim of the interviews was to find out English language instructors' attitudes towards learner autonomy. The respondents of the questionnaire were asked whether they would like to be the

participants for the interviews. The participants for the interviews were randomly selected. The interviews were conducted in English and tape-recorded. They were transcribed for analysis within two or three hours after each recording.

The interviewees were asked eleven questions about their teaching contexts, general characteristics of teachers at their institutions, their attitudes to instructional innovation, their expectations of their students (see Appendix B). Some sample interview questions are as follow: (a) "How would you describe an effective language learner?" (b) "How would you describe learners at your institute?" (c) "What do you think are your students' expectations of you?"

Semi-structured interviews were also conducted with language learners to find out their perceptions about learner autonomy (see Appendix C). For this purpose, a focus group of four students was formed at each university. The interviews were conducted in English and tape-recorded. They were transcribed two or three hours after the interviews were conducted.

The students' interview questions paralleled the teachers' interview questions. The participants of the focus groups were asked eleven questions about their learning contexts, their expectations of their teachers, their perceptions of an effective language learner. Some sample interview questions follow: (a) "To what extent should the learner be involved in making decisions on the course content?" (b) "What do you think is your teachers' primary role as an English language instructor?" (c) "What are your expectations of your teachers?"

3.3 Participants

The participants were 50 English language instructors and 20 students from 5 different universities in Armenia: Yerevan State University, the State University of Foreign Languages, the State University of Pedagogy, the French University of Armenia, and the European Regional Academy in the Caucasus. The chosen universities have common curricular emphases. All the instructors were selected from the English Departments of these universities. The students were in their fourth, penultimate year of receiving general language instruction in English. The level of their English proficiency was advanced.

3.4 Data Collection Procedure

After explaining the purpose of the study and receiving permission from the heads of the foreign language departments at the five universities in Armenia, questionnaires were distributed to English language instructors. Ten instructors from each university were asked to indicate their options on a five-point Likert scale, with 'not at all', 'a little', 'considerably', 'a lot', and 'greatly' options for each item. In addition, the respondents were asked to write a comment after each question. The questionnaires were completed and returned within two weeks. Upon administering the questionnaires, the participant language instructors were asked whether they would like to be interviewed. Two instructors from each university were interviewed. Each interview took approximately 20 minutes.

After the teacher interviews, some of the participant instructors were asked to find out whether their students would like to participate in an interview where their perceptions about learner autonomy would be investigated. Several students expressed their willingness to be interviewed. Thus, interviews were conducted with a focus group of four students at each of the five universities. The interview with each focus group lasted about 45 minutes.

3.5 Data Analysis

The data for this study was both quantitative, from the questionnaires, and qualitative, from the teacher and learner interviews. In order to analyse the quantitative data, the Statistical Packages for Social Science (SPSS 13.0) was used. Descriptive statistical procedures were used to present the data in percentages, to assess the items on a five-point Likert scale ranging from one to five, and draw conclusions.

For the qualitative data analysis, the interviews conducted with the instructors and learners were first transcribed, then analysed and discussed according to the common themes. This triangular investigation, which included the instructors' questionnaires, the semi-structured interviews with language instructors, and the focus groups with students, provided rich data to address the research questions.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Introduction

This study was designed to investigate to what extent the English language curricula promote learner autonomy at the universities in Armenia, and to find out English language instructors' and learners' attitudes towards learner autonomy. The study provided rich data to answer the following research questions:

1. Do English language syllabi at the five Armenian universities studied make students' involvement possible in decision-making processes for their own learning, and if so, to what extent?
2. What are the attitudes of English language instructors working at the five universities towards sharing responsibility with their students to promote learner autonomy in their classes?
3. What are the attitudes of English language learners studying at the five universities towards becoming more autonomous learners?

The study was conducted with the participation of 50 English language instructors and 20 students working and studying at the Yerevan State University, the State University of Foreign Languages, the State University of Pedagogy, the French University of Armenia, and the European Regional Academy in the Caucasus.

The data collected through the questionnaires and interviews is analysed in this chapter which consists of four sections. The first section presents the results of the quantitative data obtained through the questionnaires, and discusses the findings concerning the extent of learners' involvement in making decisions on the objectives of a course, selection of materials, classroom management, record keeping, and other instructional issues.

The second section of this chapter provides the analysis of the qualitative data from the interviews with 10 English language instructors. This section discusses the instructors' attitudes towards learner autonomy and encompasses a general overview of teacher and student characteristics identified by the instructors, thoughts about their teaching contexts in relation to learner autonomy, analysis of instructors' expectations of

their students and students' expectations of their teachers, as well as their points of view about what makes an effective language learner.

The third section analyses the qualitative data from the interviews with 20 English language learners. This section reveals and discusses learners' ideas about teachers' and students' general characteristics at their institutes, their thoughts about their teachers' instructional methods, their teachers' expectations of their students, and students' expectations of their teachers, and learners' ideas about an effective language learner.

4.2 Teacher Questionnaire (Quantitative Data)

The results of this study were first based on the quantitative data collected through the questionnaires (see Appendix A), which aimed at investigating to what extent the curricula at the five Armenian universities studied promote learner autonomy. The items in the questionnaire were designed on a five-point Likert scale and were assigned values ranging from 1 to 5. Respondents were asked to indicate their level of agreement according to this range. The scoring for "agreement" was as follows: 1 = Not at all, 2 = A little, 3 = Considerably, 4 = A lot, 5 = Greatly. The quantitative data was computed by means of SPSS. Descriptive statistics were used to present the percentages and the mean scores for the responses to each questionnaire item.

Entries between values ranging from 1 to 2.49 were considered as an expression of resistance to the promotion of learner autonomy. The values from 2.5 to 2.99 and from 3 to 3.49 were considered as an expression of neutral and neutral to positive attitude, respectively. The values from 3.5 to 5 were considered as an expression of support for learner autonomy. Table 1 shows the general interpretations of these entries.

Table 1: General Interpretations of Likert-Scale Entries

Actual scale	Not at all	A Little	Considerably	A lot	Greatly
Values	1	2	3	4	5
Value range	1 - 2.49	2.5 - 2.99	3 - 3.49	3.5 - 5	
Interpretations of ranges	Resistance	Neutral	Neutral to positive	Supportive	

4.2.1 Sharing Curriculum Responsibilities with Learners

Table 2 presents the mean value for the instructors' overall responses to the questionnaire.

Table 2: Mean Value for Instructors' Overall Questionnaire Responses

	N (%)	Mean	Interpretation
Participant instructors	50 (41)	2.51	Neutral

Since the mean score of 2.51 falls into the range of neutral, it reveals that the curricula at the Armenian universities allow very little learner involvement in decision making processes for learners' own learning. However, given the fact that only 41% of participants' responses fall into this range, this result cannot be considered as a reflection of all working instructors' attitudes towards the extent of promoting learner autonomy in their curricula. Moreover, as Table 3 shows, the range of the responses for some of the questionnaire items is from 1-4 and for some of them, it is from 1-5. This suggests that there is a great variability in the instructors' responses.

Table 3 provides the overall responses to each questionnaire item in percentages.

Table 3: Percentages for Instructors' Responses to all Questionnaire Items

	Questionnaire items	Not at all	A little	Considerably	A lot	Greatly
Q1a	Short-term course objectives	10%	26%	44%	20%	0%
Q 1b	Long-term course objectives	18%	32%	36%	12%	2%
Q 2a	Deciding on topics	22%	18%	44%	16%	0%
Q 2b	Deciding on tasks	30%	38%	26%	4%	2%
Q 3a	Selecting textbooks	44%	46%	8%	2%	0%
Q 3b	Selecting authentic materials	14%	48%	16%	22%	0%
Q 4	Types of classroom activities	4%	36%	46%	12%	2%
Q 5	Types of homework activities	18%	52%	16%	14%	0%
Q 6a	Time of the lesson	46%	44%	10%	0%	0%
Q 6b	Place of the lesson	46%	44%	10%	0%	0%
Q 6c	Pace of the lesson	22%	48%	22%	8%	0%
Q 7a	Position of desks	28%	30%	26%	14%	2%
Q 7b	Seating of students	8%	16%	10%	26%	40%
Q 7c	Discipline matters	20%	36%	22%	16%	6%
Q 8	Record-keeping	16%	32%	26%	16%	10%
Q 9a	Weekly self-assessment	16%	30%	36%	14%	4%
Q 9b	Monthly self-assessment	2%	26%	36%	22%	14%
Q 9c	Annual self-assessment	10%	20%	30%	26%	14%

As can be seen in Table 3, the highest percentages of instructors' responses to each questionnaire item fall in the columns "a little" and "considerably." This can suggest that the curricula in these universities neither support nor resist the promotion of learner autonomy and learners' involvement in making decisions concerning their own learning. Thus, one interpretation could be that the curricula at these universities are neutral towards the promotion of learner autonomy. The only great support (40%) that is reflected in the responses is given to Q7b about the seating of students.

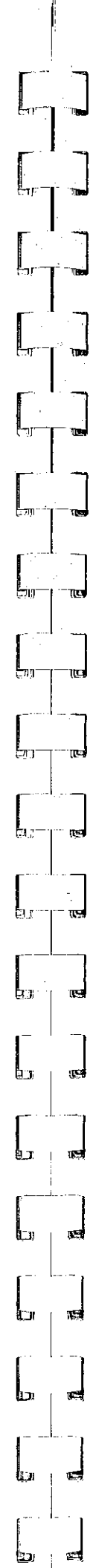
In order to compare the possible differences in attitudes among the five participating universities, mean values for these institutions were computed which were ranked in Table 4 from the most supportive to the least supportive in terms of the overall responses to the questionnaire statements.

Table 4: Mean Values for Instructors' Overall Questionnaire Responses

Participant universities	(%)	Mean	Interpretation
European Regional Academy	52	2.83	Neutral
French University	59	2.55	
Yerevan State University	52	2.49	Resistance
Brusov University	54	2.27	
Pedagogical University	70	2.1	

N (number of respondents at each university) = 10

According to Table 4, European Regional Academy (ERA) has the highest mean value of 2.83, which indicates that ERA instructors are neutral towards the promotion of learner autonomy. Similar to ERA, the mean score of 2.55 for the French University (FU) can be interpreted as instructors having neutral attitude towards sharing instructional responsibilities with learners. However, as only about 50% of the instructors' responses fall into this range, it can be suggested that there exists certain variability in the responses. The mean values of 2.49 for Yerevan State University (YSU) and 2.27 for Brusov University (BU), and the lowest mean score of 2.1 for the Pedagogical University (PU) suggest that instructors at these universities show resistance towards learners' involvement in decision making processes. However, since only 52% and 54% of YSU and BU instructors' responses fall into the resistance range, this can mean that the instructors at YSU and BU have expressed differing opinions for the questionnaire items. Therefore, these results could be interpreted as the level of



agreement between YSU and BU instructors' views not being high. The only consistency can be observed in PU instructors' responses reflected by the percentage of 70 in Table 4.

Given that the results of the participating instructors' responses concerning learners' involvement in curriculum considerations ranged from resistance to neutral to slightly positive, it will be beneficial to more specifically investigate those areas in which we can observe support, neutral attitude, or resistance. For this purpose, the mean value for each questionnaire item was computed and the questionnaire items were grouped for data analysis and ranked from the highest mean score to the lowest mean score for each university separately.

Table 5 presents the summary of the participant instructors' views as to what instructional responsibilities are actually shared with learners at each university separately. It becomes apparent from Table 5 that ERA instructors have only expressed resistance towards 6 areas. FU instructors' responses fall into the range of resistance relating to 8 curriculum issues. Resistance can be observed in 10 areas for YSU instructors' attitudes. As for BU and PU instructors' views, both showed resistance to 13 aspects of curriculum.

In order to analyse the above data, the mean values for all the instructors' responses were computed and grouped from the most favored to the least favored questionnaire item, which served as the basis for drawing comparisons between different universities and showing the level of instructors' agreement to each curriculum issue across these universities. Table 6 shows the results of these computations.

As is seen in Table 6, the mean score of 3.76 (Q7b) shows that learners can almost always decide for themselves where to sit during classes. Table 5 reveals that the highest score in favor of learner autonomy occurred for Q7b where instructors at all the universities expressed a supportive or neutral to positive attitude towards this issue. Comments provided by the instructors in the questionnaires speak about students' freedom in choosing their places in the classroom.

Table 5: Mean Values of the Questionnaire Items for Each University

Quest-re Item (Q)	European Regional Academy (ERA)			French University (FU)			Yerevan State University (YSU)			Brusov University (BU)			Pedagogical University (PU)		
	%	X	I	Q	%	X	I	Q	%	X	I	Q	%	X	I
Q7b	60	4.00	S	Q7b	60	4.10		Q7b	60	4.30		Q7b	30	3.40	I
Q9c	50	3.40		Q9c	50	3.50	S	Q9c	60	3.50	S	Q9c	70	3.40	NP
Q9b	50	3.40		Q2a	70	3.10	NP	Q9b	50	3.30	NP	Q9b	60	2.90	N
Q9a	50	3.40		Q7a	40	3.00		Q7c	40	3.20		Q7c	30	2.70	
Q1a	50	3.40	NP	Q9b	60	2.90		Q2a	60	2.80		Q8	80	2.50	
Q1b	60	3.30		Q1a	80	2.80	N	Q4	70	2.70	N	Q1a	60	2.40	
Q2b	50	3.10		Q4	40	2.80		Q1a	60	2.50		Q4	50	2.40	
Q2a	60	3.00		Q1b	70	2.60		Q1b	60	2.50		Q1b	60	2.30	
Q3b	40	3.00		Q5	60	2.60		Q8	60	2.40		Q7a	40	2.30	
Q6c	40	3.00		Q3b	70	2.50		Q9a	60	2.40		Q3b	80	2.20	R
Q4	50	2.90	N	Q9a	50	2.40		Q2b	60	2.30		Q9a	40	2.20	
Q8	60	2.50		Q2b	80	2.30		Q3b	50	2.30	R	Q5	50	2.10	
Q3a	80	2.40		Q7c	40	2.30		Q5	40	2.10		Q2a	50	2.00	
Q5	80	2.30		Q6c	60	2.00		Q7a	40	2.10		Q2b	60	1.80	
Q7c	50	2.30	R	Q6b	70	1.90		Q3a	40	1.80		Q6c	50	1.80	
Q7a	40	2.10		Q8	50	1.80		Q6c	50	1.70		Q6a	60	1.50	
Q6a	40	1.90		Q3a	70	1.70		Q6a	50	1.50		Q6b	70	1.40	
Q6b	40	1.80		Q6a	50	1.70		Q6b	50	1.50		Q3a	80	1.30	

Note: N (number of respondent instructors at each university) = 10; I = interpretation; S = supportive, NP = neutral to positive, N = neutral, R = resistance

Table 6: Mean Values for Instructors' Responses to Each Questionnaire Item

	Questionnaire Items	M	Interpretation
Q 7b	Seating of students	3.76	Supportive
Q 9c	Annually self-assessment	3.22	Neutral to Positive
Q 9b	Monthly self-assessment	3.20	
Q 9a	Weekly self-assessment	2.90	Neutral
Q 1a	Short-term course objectives	2.84	
Q 4	Types of classroom activities	2.80	
Q 3b	Selecting authentic materials	2.74	
Q 2a	Deciding on topics	2.64	
Q 7c	Discipline matters	2.62	
Q 1b	Long-term course objectives	2.48	Resistance
Q 7a	Position of desks	2.40	
Q 5	Types of homework activities	2.34	
Q 6c	Pace of the lesson	2.24	
Q 8	Record-keeping	2.22	
Q 2b	Deciding on tasks	2.20	
Q 3a	Selecting textbooks	1.76	
Q 6a	Time of the lesson	1.72	
Q 6b	Place of the lesson	1.72	

N (number of respondents) = 50

The results also reveal support for self-assessment, as the mean values of 3.22 (Q9c) and 3.20 (Q9b) fall into the range of neutral to positive. As presented in Table 5, this kind of attitude towards self-assessment is observed for all the institutions. This could mean that instructors encourage their learners to assess themselves, not just weekly but even more so annually. The mean score of 3.22 (Q9c) reveals the instructors' neutral to positive attitude towards annual self-assessment, whereas the item concerning weekly self-assessment reflects the mean value of 2.90 (Q9a), which falls into the neutral range. According to the instructors' comments, students are also provided with monthly or yearly English learning goal cards, or certain tasks and questions to assess themselves. They can sometimes have open discussions concerning the issue of their progress.

The mean scores in Table 6 ranging from 2.90 to 2.62 illustrate that participating instructors are neutral towards sharing instructional responsibilities with learners in areas such as weekly self-assessment, establishing short-term course objectives, selecting different types of classroom activities, authentic materials, topics as issues of course content, and discipline matters.

The comparison of the mean scores of 3.40 for ERA, 2.80 for FU, and 2.50 for YSU concerning the issue of deciding short-term course objectives (Q1a), introduced in



Table 5, reveal that instructors at ERA, FU, and YSU are neutral to learners' involvement in making decisions on short-term course objectives. While analysing the instructors' comments relating to this area, it became apparent that instructors find it useful for students to get involved only in deciding short-term objectives of a course, since they cannot very well realise what the general aim of the course is. Besides, short-term objectives occur in the learning process and are dictated by students' needs. Thus, by being aware of their immediate needs and evaluating their learning process, students will be able to participate in shaping some short-term objectives in accordance with their needs, taking into account the long-term objectives. However, Table 5 shows that BU and PU instructors are not willing to bring learner autonomy to this area, since the mean values of 2.4 for BU and 2.00 for PU fall into the range of resistance. This suggests that BU and PU are more conservative than the other three universities.

As for the type of classroom activities students can help decide, instructors at ERA, FU, YSU, and PU commented that they ask their students to think about the kind of activities they would like to have in class. They sometimes come up with ideas how to design more interesting and challenging activities. But they mostly rely on the instructors' choices. Very often, the reason for having little involvement in the type of classroom activities, which is reflected by the mean score of 2.80 (Q4), can be the restricted classroom and equipment conditions, as well as the mandatory syllabus which allows little room for students to decide for themselves. While the instructors at these universities give learners some room to make decisions on this issue, BU instructors' responses reflected a mean score of 2.40 presented in Table 5, which suggests some resistance towards learners' choice of classroom activities.

The mean score of 2.74 for Q3b, which asked about the selection of authentic materials, can be interpreted as instructors giving little opportunity for learners to make decisions on selecting materials for the course they are studying. Based on the instructors' comments, the reason could be the required curriculum where learners' involvement in the selection of materials does not happen very often or it happens when the material selection concerns out-of-class activities. Another reason is that the instructor usually selects authentic materials because learners find it difficult to make suggestions and mostly rely on their teacher. However, instructors at ERA and FU do not seem to agree with the instructors at the other universities as the mean values of 3.00 and 2.50 respectively reflect their more positive attitude towards giving learners more

space for selecting authentic materials. The reason for being more positive regarding this issue, as commented by the instructors at these two universities, might be that learners have more opportunities to access different types of language resources.

The analysis of the results and instructors' comments concerning the issue of making decisions on topics with the mean score of 2.64 (Q2a) suggests that the choice of topics is mainly done by the instructor taking into account what the students would need after graduating from the university. Other suggestions for this low mean score might be that only advanced learners care about the content or learners are afraid of expressing their point of view. However, it should be singled out that ERA and FU instructors' responses to this particular issue resulted in rather high mean scores of 3.00 and 3.10 respectively, which can be interpreted as instructors stressing the importance of giving learners space to decide on topics for their own learning. Moreover, the fact that instructors do not resist learners' involvement in making decisions on the topics implies that teachers realise that active learner participation in the decision making process would ensure greater motivation and effective language learning.

The computations of all the instructors' responses to the item relating to discipline matters resulted in the mean value of 2.62 (Q7c), which indicates that discipline matters are discussed together with students. However, as instructors have commented, students feel challenged to come up with decisions, as it will make them more responsible for the consequences. As is observed in Table 5, this picture does not apply to ERA and FU instructors' attitudes, since the mean score of 2.30 for both cases falls into the range of resistance. This can suggest that ERA and FU instructors do not stress the importance of involving learners in discipline issues.

The analysis of the data collected through the questionnaires revealed that the curricula at the universities in Armenia neither greatly support nor resist the promotion of learner autonomy in the areas mentioned above. There are also areas in which the curricula show resistance to the promotion of learner autonomy. Table 6 presents the mean scores for these areas ranging from 2.48 to 1.72, which can be interpreted as resistance to sharing instructional responsibilities with students.

One area that falls into this range of resistance is that concerning the establishing of long-term course objectives. The reason for the low mean score of 2.48 (Q1b) might be that long-term objectives are usually set by the chair after thorough and considerable discussions with instructors. Another explanation for this result, commented on by the

instructors, might be that the traditional teaching-learning relationship established at school does not prepare students to actively position themselves in their learning. There is almost no creativity required in admissions – students have to only memorise the standard answers for the writing test of English, and certain topics for the speaking test of English.

For the issue of the position of desks that reflected a mean score of 2.40, instructors commented that desks are fixed so it is impossible to change anything. Another explanation given by the respondents is that the teacher should give preference to students' sitting equal distance from each other. Sometimes they do not even ask their students about how to position the desks.

The mean value of 2.34 for the item related to the type of homework activities shows resistance which can be explained by the instructors' suggestions that students have almost no control over homework activities. Instructors also commented on their choices by stating that learners mostly rely on the instructors' decisions. Even if they decide on the type of homework activities, their suggestions mainly tend to aim at spending less time on the tasks assigned.

Sharing of responsibilities with students concerning the time, place, and pace of the lesson is not evident with the low mean scores of 1.72 (Q6a), 1.72 (66b), and 2.24 (Q6c) respectively. The main reason for these results could be that time and place decisions are made by the dean's office. As for the pace of the lesson, the comments in the questionnaire suggested that decisions are made based on how fast students cover the material, how motivated they are, and how well prepared they come to class.

Record-keeping is not encouraged in the curricula, as shown by the mean score of 2.22 (Q8). Some comments given by the instructors suggest that generally instructors provide students with information on their progress when students ask for it. A participant's point of view is that progress can be observed only through the whole learning period of 4-5 years, which is why students are not encouraged to keep records of their learning progress in classes.

Based on the mean value of 2.20 (Q2b) for the item relating to making decisions on tasks, it can be inferred that learners are not involved in selecting the tasks for their own learning. The instructors explained their choice by commenting that they have to design tasks themselves because tasks are connected with certain tests, although they realise that encouraging students to choose tasks would raise their motivation for classes.

The weakest vote for learner autonomy at all the universities was for Q3a, the issue of textbooks, which resulted in the mean score of 1.76, which can be understood based on the fact that the chair chooses textbooks according to the students' level of proficiency.

4.2.2 Summary

The general picture of the curricula considerations in the examination of the questionnaires concerning the extent to which learner autonomy is promoted at the five universities studied in Armenia reveals that the curricula neither support nor resist learners' involvement in decision-making processes for their own learning. One interpretation could be that learners are not ready to take responsibilities for their own learning. Being usually told what to do, learners are still in the transition period from teacher-centered learning to learner-centered learning. Additionally, the traditional domains of the school system within which teachers and learners operate may make instructors themselves feel incapable of initiating any innovations or changes in certain areas of the classroom experience. This is very much the case in centralised education systems, where, for example, textbooks are prescribed by the central authority and the availability of space and resources is extremely limited. Therefore, the weakest votes for issues such as selecting textbooks, or deciding on the time and place of the lesson cannot be considered to be a reflection of teachers' professional views. Rather, it reflects a situation where some aspects of classroom experience are dictated by forces outside the classroom, and beyond the influence or discretion of the instructors or learners. Taking into account teachers' awareness of the importance of learner autonomy and their readiness to promote it in different aspects of classroom experience, it can be concluded that there exists room for change or flexibility.

This section discussed the results of the questionnaire and provided the general picture to what extent the curricula promote learner autonomy at the five universities studied in Armenia. The next section will discuss the qualitative data obtained from teacher interviews.

4.3 Teacher Interviews (Qualitative Data)

This section reports the qualitative data gathered through face-to-face semi-structured interviews with 10 English language instructors (2 instructors from each university) to follow up on specific information from the questionnaire (see Appendix B). This made it possible to answer the research question concerning teachers' attitudes towards learner autonomy. The data was analysed according to the interview questions and grouped into three thematic subsections: teachers' profiles, learners' profiles, and sharing responsibilities with learners. The examples in this section that are taken from teacher interviews and represent the instructors' original views are not edited.

4.3.1 Teachers' Profiles

The interviewees were asked to describe teachers at their universities. They stated that teachers are now experiencing a transition period because novelty and traditional are fighting with each other. Teachers at YSU, BU, and PU agreed that instructors at their universities fall into two groups. There are teachers who are very conservative, who cling to their old methods. Their instruction is much more teacher-centered and the teacher is the authority and they expect students to be very humble and never raise any objections. But most of the teachers are young and more progressive and they try to implement new teaching methods and philosophies. They are very democratic and are more like facilitators. They make students think more for themselves and be more independent. However, teachers at ERA and FU stated that all teachers at their universities belong to the second group. This might be the reason that these two universities are relatively new and the traditional could not have penetrated into their educational system.

Interviewee (FU):

Teachers at our university are highly qualified specialists. They are responsible for teaching and learning process and approach this task very seriously. They are highly motivated, enthusiastic, and dedicated. They appreciate cooperative work and continuously seek ways and possibilities to satisfy their students' requirements.

The inclusion of new instructional methods and techniques is an important issue for the promotion of learner autonomy. Generally, teachers at all the universities welcome innovation, although they state that they come across certain difficulties. They

all agree that they have to use new methods because the society is changing and the demands are changing, even the students and their mentality are changing. But it cannot be done abruptly, because progress is never abrupt. It is a gradual process and if change is too fast, it may cause some damage to the teaching and learning process. Instructors try to base their teaching on different methods and techniques that include interaction, group work, pair work, peer-editing. They also mentioned about inquiries they conduct with learners through which they become facilitators for their students and not commanders. These inquiries help learners to unfold their inner sights, strengths and weaknesses. They stated that they are provided with space and flexibility to put their innovations into practice. However, teachers at YSU, BU, and PU also complained that they are not provided with technical support that would help their students become much more autonomous learners.

Interviewee (PU):

Fortunately, I am involved in teacher-training programs due to which we try to use new teaching methods, new attitude to learners, more learner-centered education in which we face many difficulties. But we try. One of the difficulties is that we do not even have computers for our learners to use them, to search for information in the Internet.

In order to analyse what an ideal student is, as defined by the instructors, they were asked to describe their expectations of their students. There is considerable agreement between the instructors on this issue as they all stated that they expect their learners to become more independent, hard-working, more active in their learning, to be well aware of their rights and duties, to be more creative in terms of learning and searching materials, to constantly improve their language skills and develop strategies that will help them bring the knowledge gained in the classroom to the world outside.

Interviewee (PU):

Taking into consideration the new attitude towards learners, we expect them to become more independent, more active both in their citizenship and learnership, and these expectations also need to have material basis, sources, which, unfortunately, here in Armenia are still at a very low level.

Interviewee (ERA):

My expectation of my students is to be able to connect the knowledge with real life, to help them take everything done in the classroom to real life.

Teachers' role is a crucial issue in fostering learner autonomy. Thus, it was interesting to find out instructors' perspectives of their primary role as English language teachers. The majority of the instructors responded that their role is to stimulate learners' interest in the acquisition of language skills, to be aware of their students' interests and allow them to express themselves, increase their motivation and willingness to use the target language. Also, teachers should be aware of learners' problems and try to help them when necessary. It is very important to change learners' way of thinking and show a good way of learning. Some instructors emphasised that classes should be made more authentic and students should be brought to the environment where everything is real and they can feel self-confident and they can overcome all the obstacles typical of the English speaking environment. The primary role of any language instructor is to make students love the language they are studying because love is the initial stimulus, which helps learners go forward without the help of the instructor. On the whole, all the instructors showed agreement in that they see themselves as facilitators rather than commanders.

Interviewee (YSU):

The role of a teacher is to teach students how to learn. And the rest depends on the student. It is our role to give them good direction, good way of learning, but we cannot put everything into their heads. We cannot learn instead of them.

Interviewee (BU):

I see my role as a facilitator. I want to see cognitive change in my students, a cognitive pattern change, actually, the way they think. I want to help them learn how to learn and become more independent.

4.3.2 Learners' Profiles

The interviewees were asked to describe their learners to understand what instructors think about their students. Instructors at ERA and FU described their learners as open-minded, critical, and reflective. However, most of the interviewees stated that they do not work hard. Learners do not take responsibility for their education and demand everything from the instructor. They are not autonomous; they do not enlarge their knowledge themselves. Most of them are too dependent on teachers. In addition, they do not see the link between the academic education they get and the job they will have afterwards. That is why they are mostly apathetic and pessimistic because they do not know how they are going to apply their knowledge to their jobs.

Interviewee (PU):

Learners are different, years are different. From school they come very passive, used to authoritarian approach in teaching, and they expect us to give all the detailed instructions and assignments for their learning. But students of higher levels become more independent and get used to using new information sources.

Interviewee (BU):

I don't see there is acknowledgement or realisation of learners' own responsibility for their own education. I think they are still used to be baby-sitted or spoon-fed. And that is what I want to see changed. I can already see this change, but it's a very slow change. The mentality changes very slow.

In order to understand students' expectations of their instructors, the interviewees were asked what their students expect of them. Instructors expressed almost the same opinions relating to learners' expectations - to have a good instructor who has appropriate language knowledge, to get good grades not to fail the exams, to give them everything they need without making efforts to gain anything by themselves.

Interviewee (PU):

Expectations become different. In their first year, they expect to see us school teachers, and later they expect us to help them in their studies. Besides, students are different - some of them are motivated only to get marks they want, others seriously want to acquire knowledge and get skills. And depending on their motives, they expect us to give them either high marks or real knowledge.

Interviewee (BU):

In the beginning, they expected me to make all the decisions for them. During the course they understood that I should just be a facilitator. I will just give a hint or help them or guide them but I won't do the job for them. So, I hope they now expect me just to help them be independent.

All the instructors agreed that an effective language learner is an autonomous, independent, cooperative, confident, and responsible learner who knows why he learns the language and who looks for ways of improving the target language. These learners are motivated and hard-working. It is not enough for them to have the appropriate knowledge. They should also possess the skills that enable them to turn the intake into input. Only in this case can the learner be called an effective language learner.

Interviewee (ERA):

Effective language learner is a person who is a good team-member, who knows how to work effectively in a group, who has a kind of slogan "Learn how to learn." In this case, they can combine performance with competence, when they know how to express themselves, how to become the carrier of the knowledge or the skills which are taught during the class.

Interviewee (YSU):

An effective language learner is an interactive language learner, who strives for finding language communication, who goes in any activities not only in the classroom but also in the surroundings.

4.3.3 Sharing Responsibilities with Learners

As learner participation in decision-making processes is one of the major aspects of the concept of learner autonomy, the instructors expressed their ideas concerning to what extent learners should be involved in making decisions on the course content. Ideally, they all emphasised students' role in the design of course content and in the implementation of a student-centered approach. They sometimes do needs analysis, have discussions with students concerning the course content, ask them to make some suggestions, ask for their preferences. However, either learners do not have their opinions or that they come up with suggestions that are not well thought out enough to take into account in the course content. The reasons might be that they are too dependent on their teachers or they themselves do not know what they need. That is why they come to the institute expecting to get everything and not to make any suggestions or find their own ways.

Interviewee (PU):

Students here are not conscious enough and they don't use their rights to the necessary extent to be involved in making decisions on the course content. I think, this is something that students have to learn and we have to teach them, to show them their rights, their freedoms.

Interviewee (BU):

They come to the institute without realising their needs. Even after graduating from it, they are not conscious of their duties, of their rights and what kind of knowledge they particularly need in their further work. This is why we cannot rely on them. We have to show them their needs.

The interviewees expressed their agreement concerning learners' involvement in making decisions on classroom management, particularly on seating of students. They sometimes take into account their learners' suggestions about the place and time of the lesson, but not always. The instructors explained this view by stating that generally the department decides on the time and place of the lesson.

Interviewee (FU):

As we try to implement student-centered approach, at the beginning of each semester we ask our students to make decisions on these issues. They might come up with suggestions that we discuss in class and if the majority agrees we tailor our courses accordingly.

Interviewee (ERA):

They can only be the decision-makers in arranging desks or seating of students. I think it's our job to decide where and when we should have our classes, otherwise we would make a mess in our schedule.

Two important notions that learner autonomy is based on are trust and confidence between teachers and learners. Instructors believe that trust and confidence can best be created when there is a sharing of responsibilities and ideas between teachers and learners, when learners are given opportunities to do more extracurricular activities, when the relation between the teacher and the learner is not that of a superior and inferior, when they both know their rights and duties and are targeted on the development of the language capacity that will help the learners become autonomous.

Interviewee (PU):

Teachers trust their students, of course, if it doesn't come to assessment. And students still have to be taught to trust their teachers. The best way to create this atmosphere of trust between teacher and students is to give them more extracurricular activities which is very, very limited in our curriculum.

Interviewee (BU):

I think, really like Shakespeare said, "Actions speak louder than words." If learners see that you mean what you say, that it's not instructors versus students game, that we are all in the same boat and we are all working on their improvement, then just behavior, modeling will create this atmosphere of trust.

Interviewee (ERA):

When teachers and learners become a combined or a single unity in their thoughts, in their concepts, in their perceptions, we can say that this is the victory of the teacher because as the proverb says, "The teacher puts on the students' shoes" and their relationship is dependent on the first day of their meeting.

All the instructors agree that the principle of lifelong education is now becoming more and more widespread among the Armenian educators and the role of higher education is to teach learners how to learn. When learners know how to learn, their

progress becomes evident. It is a starting point for them to continue developing, work individually, and make decisions for their future.

Interviewee (FU):

The students themselves must seek ways to learn. This process will enable them to start making decisions, come up with new ideas. It is not a good idea to make our students become a 'Pavlov's dog.' The society needs independent, clever, and intelligent people.

Interviewee (ERA):

No learning can be successful without interaction. When we say interaction, we mean learn how to learn. This is a triangular process when you take knowledge, pair with a person, and share the knowledge. As a great philosopher has mentioned, "Knowledge can't be borrowed from other person, knowledge should be developed." And alongside with the knowledge, also the skills should be developed, and in this case the perception of students on this or that knowledge becomes various.

Interviewee (BU):

The Chinese proverb says, "When you give someone fish, you feed that person for one day. When you teach the person how to fish, you feed him the whole life." This can also work for higher education the role of which is to help students learn how to learn. So, it is more important for our learners to become autonomous learners.

4.3.4 Summary

To sum up the findings it became evident that generally instructors are positive towards promoting learner autonomy in their classroom. They do not resist bringing innovations into their teaching contexts and are trying to implement different methods and techniques. However, they face certain difficulties with this process. One of the obstacles that they come across in their teaching is the lack of technical support that would enable their learners to become much more autonomous. Instructors at YSU, BU, and PU commented on this obstacle in the questionnaire, which suggests that the low mean scores for certain aspects of classroom considerations might be the result of the restricted classroom and equipment conditions. Instructors very well realise their role of a facilitator rather than an authority, who is ready to help learners learn how to learn. Another major issue that concerns the instructors is the learners themselves who come from secondary school very passive, not ready to make suggestions or express their thoughts. This fact makes it difficult for learners to get involved in making decisions for their own learning. This concern was also reflected by the teachers' comments in the questionnaire and by the mean values that fall into the range of neutral attitude towards sharing instructional responsibilities with learners.

4.4 Learner Interviews (Qualitative Data)

This section provides the results of the qualitative data obtained through five focus group interviews with 20 learners (4 students from each university), which reveal learners' views concerning certain considerations in the promotion of learner autonomy (see Appendix C). The results are discussed in terms of the questions asked during the interviews with learners and grouped thematically into the following three subsections: teachers' profiles, learners' profiles, and sharing responsibilities with learners. The section provides samples from learner interviews that are not edited.

4.4.1 Teachers' Profiles

Learners seem to agree with their instructors' ideas that teachers at their universities fall into two groups: those who still follow their traditional teaching methods and use books published 30 years ago, and those who apply innovations in their teaching. Generally, learners described their teachers as highly professional specialists who stimulate learners in their studies, who are friendly and understanding, who do everything to make students responsible for their own learning.

Interviewee (PU):

Instructors encourage us not only in our studying but also in doing research.

Interviewee (YSU):

Instructors at our university are highly professional, well aware of what they are doing. They are the masters of their work. They help us, try to promote our research work, do everything in order to make us be responsible for the learning process.

According to the learners' views, instructors at their universities include new instructional methods and techniques in their teaching. They are well aware of the latest developments, which they try to apply in the classroom. They encourage learners to participate in deciding on topics, tasks, to come up with their own suggestions and ideas. One innovation that the learners at ERA, FU, and BU mentioned is learning through electronic contact, which they find beneficial for developing themselves.

Interviewee (FU):

Teachers use instructional innovations. Our lessons are interactive, there is a contact between teachers and students. It's not like during the Soviet times when they did translations and lessons were kind of boring. Now they are really interesting.

Interviewee (BU):

They stimulate us to participate in classes, as participation for students plays a great role in developing ourselves.

Learners' ideas were rather interesting concerning teachers' expectations of their students. They acknowledge very well that teachers expect them to attend classes, to be ready for lessons, to be active and hard working, to do individual work outside the classroom, to express their own suggestions and thoughts. However, learners at YSU also added that there are many cases when teachers do not care about learners' progress in language learning, which is the fault of learners who do not even realise their learning goals and think that the greater part depends on the teacher.

Interviewee (PU):

There is a saying that the best student is the one who prevails over his teacher. So, I think teachers' expectation of us is to gain more knowledge than he has, to be better than he is.

Interviewee (YSU):

I am sure that every generation of teachers expect of us to acquire knowledge, but there are surely teachers who do not care of the process of the acquisition of knowledge because many learners do not have the stimulus to acquire this knowledge.

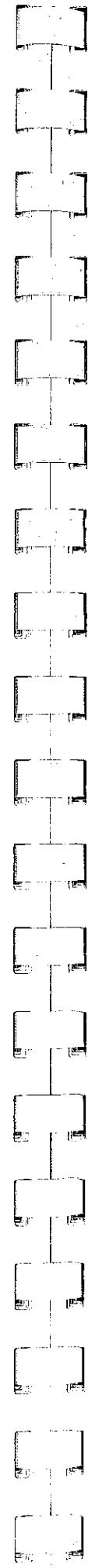
As for the primary role of English language instructors, learners described them as facilitators, leaders, counselors, who give learners as much knowledge as they can, who lead them through their learning, develop skills and strategies, who make their students become more interested in the language, who show them how to learn so that they can continue their work individually, do personal research, who stimulate learners to be engaged in the process of instruction.

Interviewee (PU):

I think, the role of the English teacher is to lead, to facilitate, and to ensure the efficient work of their students. But it doesn't mean that the teacher must learn instead of students.

Interviewee (BU):

The teacher should not teach us the language as an aim, but language as a tool to other spheres of life.



Interviewee (FU):

The teacher should also be a counselor to show students what to learn, how to learn, what kind of English to choose, to show them the right ways of learning a language.

4.4.2 Learners' Profiles

The interviewees described the majority of learners at their institutes as irresponsible people who come to classes just to get the diploma or to have fun. Or they think that learning a language is just getting the surface knowledge given in the classroom. They do not really acknowledge why they are studying the language. They believe it is just one of the subjects in their curriculum that should be taken. This group of learners requires everything from teachers and thinks that it will be enough for them to learn the language without taking responsibility to improve their language skills individually. These might be the reasons why teachers become discouraged and do not attempt to improve their instruction.

Interviewee (BU):

I remember very well when in the first year students in my class loved the idea of entering the university. But, unfortunately, this love does not extend up to the fifth year because many of them imagine that learning a language means only oral speech. I think they should be taught what language learning is.

Interviewee (YSU):

Teachers do not pay such a great attention to the instructional process, or try to improve it because when they see that 80% of learners are not at all interested in the process of learning, this is not encouraging for them because whatever they do, these people will never listen, will never do.

All the interviewees mentioned that they do not belong to the majority of students who are not responsible for their own learning. Thus, they expect their teachers to share the knowledge with them, to facilitate their learning process, also to give them freedom to speak up, to be strict, but not a dictator.

Interviewee (ERA):

I would like not to have a dictator in a class who creates a very suppressive atmosphere, and it is very hard to express your own thoughts which is very important for a learner, especially for a language learner.

Interviewee (BU):

The most important thing for a teacher is professionalism, which includes not only knowledge but also the ability to serve his knowledge to your audience. Second, a teacher should be flexible in his methods, also in the range of tasks. Third, a teacher should be student-centered. He should not cling to his traditional education, methods and be more focused on the students' abilities, on their capacities.

The interviewed learners had a clear understanding of an effective language learner. They stated that an effective language learner is someone who knows what he wants from life, who works hard every day, communicates with English speaking people to become fluent, likes to read English books. However, they also added that the majority of learners do not realise that language is not just a subject, a structure of something, but knowledge that requires continuous improvement on the part of the learner.

Interviewee (YSU):

An effective language learner is the one who is not confined to classroom activities only. For effective language acquisition, language learners must visit libraries, use books, pay great attention to individual work.

Interviewee (FU):

I think you must not just work during the lesson. To learn a language is always very difficult and there is always a lot of things to learn, so you have to always work on yourself.

4.4.3 Sharing Responsibilities with Learners

Almost all the learners agree that there should be a certain program to follow. But at the same time the teacher should give them a chance to make decisions on the course content. They admit that whenever they have a choice they learn with more enthusiasm, therefore learning becomes more efficient. However, this cannot be said for all students because the majority of them are not ready and willing to take some of the instructional responsibilities on their shoulders being used to the Soviet educational system when learners did not get an opportunity to express their thoughts and needs. This might be the reason that learners become indifferent to their learning process and whenever they are given a chance to make decisions they might come up with the easiest tasks without realising their own goals and needs.

Interviewee (YSU):

It would be effective if learners were able to make decisions. They are accustomed when the teacher is the dominant and the authority. There should be some kind of instructional information concerning learners' rights and duties, the general aim of the course for the learners to be more confident and responsible.

Interviewee (PU):

We are adults, and it is better to give us a chance to choose what we want to learn, because no matter if the teacher forces the person to learn, he or she will never do. If we have a choice, learning becomes more efficient.

The analysis of learners' views concerning the issue of trust and confidence between teachers and learners revealed that much depends on teachers, how they instruct and treat their students. Teachers should be friendly, help their students to overcome their learning difficulties and respect their students' ideas. As for learners, they should work hard and appreciate teachers' work. Moreover, there should be cooperation between teachers and learners.

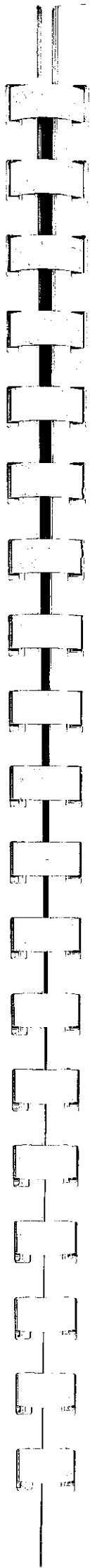
Interviewee (BU):

When a teacher on his/her part and a student on his/her part understand the requirements expected from them, then mutual understanding and trust will be created.

Interviewee (ERA):

Trust and confidence between teachers and learners can be created only when both teachers and learners do something to achieve this. Teachers must give the appropriate knowledge, and learners must be responsible and must see that teachers have good attitude towards them.

The interviewees fully agreed with the statement that the role of higher education is helping students learn how to learn. They responded that if all the learners could realise that at the university they need to learn not only what they are taught but also do a lot of individual work, they would be more efficient and successful learners. Unfortunately, the picture at the Armenian state universities is that most learners do not want to take the responsibility for their own learning. The respondents explained that the university should be a place where learners find their own way of learning, obtain skills and strategies, develop the habit of improving their knowledge of language by reading books, searching for information, attending English speaking events. They added to the statement 'learn how to learn' that at the university students learn how to live, as it provides them with tools to overcome difficulties in their life.



Interviewee (BU):

Learn how to learn. I think this idea is very similar to the idea think how to think. When we do not learn how to learn, we only learn those things that are taught at the moment, but when we learn how to learn, we also master techniques of learning more knowledge than is digested during a class.

Interviewee (YSU):

We are not here just to acquire knowledge, but at the same time we are learning to acquire knowledge by ourselves. It is very important for a student to become independent because the teacher will not cover all the material and students have to go with the rest individually.

4.4.4 Summary

To sum up the findings of the learner interviews it should be highlighted that learners consider their instructors as highly professional specialists who welcome instructional innovation, stimulate learners in their studies and do their best to make their students responsible for their own learning. However, the majority of students do not realise what language learning is, why they are studying it, and what their rights and duties are. They require everything from teachers and do not take responsibility to improve their language skills individually. This kind of approach towards language learning on the part of learners makes them indifferent and unmotivated regarding their learning process. It also creates difficulties for learners to come up with suggestions or make decisions concerning their own learning. Moreover, learners' lack of responsibility towards their learning brings about a situation where teachers become discouraged, disempowered and do not want to try to improve their instruction.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION

5.1 Introduction

To address the research questions presented in Chapter Two the present study was set up to investigate whether and to what extent English language syllabi at the five Armenian universities studied promote learner autonomy, and the attitudes of English language instructors and students towards learner autonomy. The underlying assumption was that learner-centered language syllabi, language teachers' willingness to share instructional responsibilities with their learners, and students' readiness to assume greater responsibility for and take charge of their own learning would promote learner autonomy in the classroom. The following research questions were formulated:

1. Do English language syllabi at the five Armenian universities studied make students' involvement possible in decision-making processes for their own learning, and to what extent?
2. What are the attitudes of English language instructors working at the five universities towards sharing responsibility with their students to promote learner autonomy in their classes?
3. What are the attitudes of English language learners studying at the five universities towards becoming more autonomous learners?

This chapter consists of four sections. The first section will report the major findings of this research. In the second section, pedagogical implications for the universities will be presented. Limitations of the study and suggestions for further research will be discussed in the third and fourth sections.

5.2 Findings

The major findings of this study will be discussed in two different subsections. The first subsection will present instructors' opinions as to what extent learners share responsibility in certain educational areas and their views about their students and their



specific teaching contexts in relation to the promotion of learner autonomy. The second subsection will report the major findings concerning learners' views about teachers' fostering learner autonomy in their classes.

5.2.1 Instructors' Overall Attitudes towards Learner Autonomy

The overall picture of the results showed that participating instructors are neutral towards learner autonomy, which is reflected by a mean score of 2.51 on the 5-point Likert scale questionnaire (see Table 2).

The European Regional Academy (ERA), with 10 participating instructors and a mean value of 2.83 (see Table 4) and the French University (FU), with 10 participating instructors and a mean value of 2.55 (see Table 4) on the questionnaire seem to support most strongly the promotion of learner autonomy. The results gathered from the interviews conducted with instructors from ERA and FU support the results of the questionnaire. The instructors stated that their students are motivated, enthusiastic, and aware of the importance of learning English for their future careers. The reason might be that both ERA and FU have a one-year preparatory school that prepares learners for their future studies. Learners gain self-confidence in terms of expressing their ideas, taking initiatives in the classroom and thus actively participate in English courses. Additionally, instructors at ERA and FU are provided with flexibility as well as other resources to put their initiatives and innovations into practice. This kind of picture is revealed not only through ERA and FU teacher interviews but also through their comments and questionnaire mean scores that show the instructors' neutral or neutral-to-positive attitude towards sharing instructional responsibilities with learners in most aspects of the classroom context (see Table 5). This kind of positive picture can also be a result of the fact that the majority of instructors at ERA and FU are young and have received up-to-date training in teaching. Instructors' choices fall into the resistance range only concerning the aspects of selecting textbooks and time and place of the lesson. This can be explained not as a reflection of their professional views but rather as a reflection of the fact that decisions on these issues are usually made by experts. Because nearly 50% of ERA and FU instructors' responses shows that there is no consistent agreement in their choices, the data cannot be considered as a reflection of all ERA and FU English language instructors' attitudes towards learner autonomy. However, based on the data analysis, ERA and FU instructors appear not to resist the promotion of learner autonomy in their teaching contexts.

Through data analysis, it became evident that Yerevan State University (YSU), with 10 instructors participating and a mean value of 2.49 (see Table 4), Brusov University (BU), with 10 instructors participating and a mean value of 2.27 (see Table 4), and Pedagogical University (PU), with 10 instructors participating and a mean value of 2.1 (see Table 4), resist the promotion of learner autonomy in their teaching contexts. Several reasons came up for this kind of attitude both through the teacher comments in the questionnaires and through teacher interviews. One of the reasons might be that these universities do not have preparatory courses that would inform learners what language learning is. Another reason, that is most important, is that teachers at these universities are not provided with suitable teaching contexts and technological devices. Additionally, they stated that most of their students come from different backgrounds, often with negative past experiences in terms of foreign language learning. For that reason students resist taking an active part in English classes. The aspects of curriculum considerations that reflected resistance concern record-keeping, weekly self-assessment, deciding on tasks, types of homework activities, selecting authentic materials, selecting textbooks, and deciding on time, place and pace of the lesson (see Table 5). However, as only 52% and 54% of YSU and BU instructors showed a non-supporting attitude towards learner autonomy, these results suggest that there was variability of choices in the instructors' answers in the questionnaire. Therefore, the findings cannot be considered a reflection of all YSU and BU instructors' views. As for PU, 70% of instructors' responses show greater consistency in their choices, which can be interpreted as the majority of instructors having almost the same resistant attitude to learner autonomy.

The overall results showed that English language instructors' attitudes towards learner autonomy change depending upon the facilities they are provided with by their universities. Moreover, not only English language instructors, but also students seem discouraged by inappropriate teaching and learning contexts. However, the interviews revealed that instructors at these universities are very well aware of how ideal foreign language programs and English language teachers should be and they, thus, seem to be willing to change in accordance with learner autonomy if their teaching context is improved. This kind of picture of instructors' attitudes might also be the result of the fact that teachers need time to prepare their students to realise their responsibilities, to be ready to share them and become autonomous.

5.2.2 Learners' Overall Attitudes towards Learner Autonomy

The analysis of learners' attitudes towards learner autonomy revealed that learners want to see their teachers as friends who are professional specialists, who stimulate their learners in their studies and help them get deep knowledge. However, the interviewed students stated that the majority of learners are not ready and willing to share instructional responsibilities with teachers. This can be explained by several reasons: this group of learners does not realise what language learning is, what their learning goals, rights and duties are. The reason could also be that these learners do not feel responsibility for their own learning and come to classes just to get a diploma or to have fun. Moreover, they think that the teacher is a resource who should give learners everything they need and very little, if not nothing, depends on themselves. Having this perception about language learning, they do not take responsibility to improve their language skills individually. Learners added that their classmates' lack of responsibility and motivation to acquire knowledge might be the result of their past experiences when they did not realise language learning goals and had almost no opportunity to participate in decision making processes for their own learning. The result of the whole picture is that not only learners themselves but also teachers become discouraged about learners' progress in language learning and they do not attempt to improve their instruction. Learners suggested that first there should be a careful selection of students for entering university based on the proficiency level of their language knowledge, or students should be taught what language learning is, that is there should be some kind of instructional information concerning learners' rights and duties, the general aim of the course for students to become more confident and responsible. The participant learners also mentioned learner needs analysis at the end of each year that would enable teachers to find out the strengths and weaknesses of their classes and decide what the following students would need to benefit from their studies.

5.3 Pedagogical Implications

The analysis of the data revealed that the promotion of learner autonomy in formal learning environments depends on the development of the physical conditions of teaching and learning contexts. In addition, instructors need to be provided with in-service training so that they can be up-to-date in their teaching. The research also found out that instructors should be given professional training in order to be able to promote

learner autonomy effectively. Moreover, because teacher commitment is considered to be very important for the promotion of learner autonomy, instructors should be informed about learner autonomy, and its demands on instructors. If they are provided with a variety of opportunities to understand the meaning of learner autonomy, its prerequisites, and its benefits for their teaching and student learning, they may be willing to become more autonomous themselves. This might lead to promising results in terms of enabling and encouraging learners to also become more effective and autonomous learners. The results also emphasized the need for universities to have learner training or preparatory class programs to motivate learners and provide them with instructional information about their language learning needs and responsibilities.

5.4 Limitation of the Study

Given the time constraints, this study had to focus on no more than five universities. This prevented me from assessing more institutions and increasing the amount of data obtained. If the number of institutions had been greater, the results could be more generalisable. In particular, the information related to participating instructors' views as to what instructional responsibilities are shared with learners could have been more enlightening if the number of instructors responding to the questionnaires were higher. Because of the fact that time for the research was limited, I managed to visit only five universities to conduct questionnaires and interviews. For that reason, I could not make classroom observations at the universities in terms of setting, physical conditions, and curriculum issues. Personal observations would have enabled me to make comments on possible reasons and solutions for the promotion of learner autonomy in these specific teaching and learning contexts.

The other research instrument, interviews, as conducted with volunteer instructors and learners, added more depth to the data. However, because of the limited amount of the time for this study, I conducted interviews with only 10 instructors. If the number of the instructors had been higher, I could have obtained more detailed information about their practices. In this way, instructors' knowledge, specifically about their teaching contexts, could have been better understood, and interpretations related to their specific teaching contexts would have been more solidly grounded.

5.5 Suggestions for Further Studies

This study covered five universities in Armenia and investigated English language instructors' and learners' attitudes towards learner autonomy. In further studies, the attitudes of administrators can be explored. Through this triangulation, a more reliable picture of the prerequisites for the promotion of learner autonomy at the universities in Armenia can be drawn. In this way, the areas that need special attention in the current systems can be identified, and any necessary measures for the promotion of learner autonomy can be introduced to change the system. Because professional development for administrators and teachers is crucial for the promotion of learner autonomy, such research would help in understanding what kind of professional training is necessary.

In addition, case studies of instructors applying techniques and methods to promote learner autonomy might be conducted. Obtaining data through multiple sources, such as interviews with administrators, instructors and students, reflective journals or learning logs kept by both instructors and learners, pre- and post-treatment questionnaires might provide detailed information concerning the advantages and challenges of the promotion of learner autonomy in their specific teaching and learning contexts.

Another study could identify the influence of training on the effectiveness of learner autonomy to enable learners to become more effective language learners. The study could involve two groups of instructors, one training learners to become more autonomous and one following the traditional way of teaching. Later, a comparison of these groups in terms of applying techniques and methods to promote learner autonomy could be conducted. Such a study might clarify the issues concerning what the training should focus on, whether or not Armenia is a promising ground for the promotion of learner autonomy, what methods and techniques may work in specific contexts with certain type of students, and how to integrate them into the existing curricula of universities, and what changes should be made to enable students to become effective learners.

The findings of the research revealed that the universities in Yerevan are promising grounds for the promotion of learner autonomy. However, to encourage instructors to promote learner autonomy and thus enable learners to become more

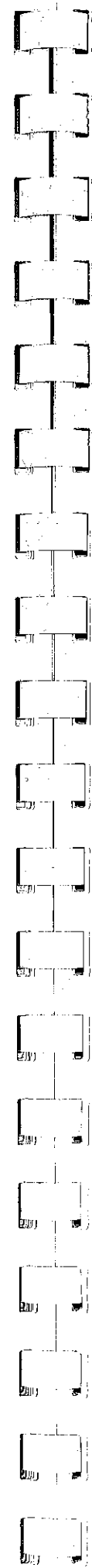
autonomous and effective language learners, some issues should be taken into consideration. These involve providing instructors with better teaching contexts and more technological teaching resources. For learners to develop motivation for language learning and realise their responsibilities, preparatory class programs should be offered. Additionally, an in-service training for instructors, and systematic and planned adjustments in the curricula might contribute to the promotion of learner autonomy in these universities.

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APPENDIX A
Questionnaire for Teachers

Dear English language instructors,

I am an MA TEFL student at the American University of Armenia and I am conducting this study to gather information on to what extent the English language syllabi at the university you are teaching consider students' involvement in decision-making processes for their own learning. The findings of this study will provide useful information for curriculum planners and administrators who are planning or revising their syllabi so as to implement and promote *learner autonomy* in their teaching contexts.

All responses will be kept confidential. If you would like to learn the results of this study, please provide your e-mail address below, and I will keep you informed.

Thank you in advance for your contribution and time.

Respectfully yours,

Lilit Avetisyan
MA TEFL program
American University of Armenia
Tel: (091) 507027

avetisyan_lilit@yahoo.com

Personal information

Name (optional): _____

Gender: Male Female

Educational degree: BA MA PhD

How long have you been teaching English? _____

E-mail address: (optional) _____

Phone number: (optional) _____

Questionnaire

Please circle the numbers and comment on your answers.

1. To what extent is the learner involved in establishing the objectives of a course of study you are teaching?		Not at all	A Little	Considerably	A lot	Greatly
Short-term		1	2	3	4	5
Long-term		1	2	3	4	5

Comment:

2. To what extent is the learner involved in deciding the content of a course you are teaching?		Not at all	A Little	Considerably	A lot	Greatly
Topics		1	2	3	4	5
Tasks		1	2	3	4	5

Comment:

3. To what extent is the learner involved in selecting materials for your classes?		Not at all	A Little	Considerably	A lot	Greatly
Textbooks		1	2	3	4	5
Authentic materials		1	2	3	4	5

Comment:

4. To what extent is the learner involved in decisions on the type of classroom activities to be done during your lessons?		Not at all	A Little	Considerably	A lot	Greatly
		1	2	3	4	5

Comment:

5. To what extent is the learner involved in decisions on the type of homework activities which follow on from your classes?	Not at all	A Little	Consi-derably	A lot	Greatly
	1	2	3	4	5

Comment:

6. To what extent is the learner involved in decisions on the time, place and pace of the lesson?	Not at all	A Little	Consi-derably	A lot	Greatly	
	Time	1	2	3	4	5
	Place	1	2	3	4	5
	Pace	1	2	3	4	5

Comment:

7. To what extent is the learner involved in decisions on classroom management?	Not at all	A Little	Consi-derably	A lot	Greatly
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Position of desks	1	2	3	4	5
Seating of students	1	2	3	4	5
Discipline matters	1	2	3	4	5

Comment:

8. To what extent is the learner involved in decisions on record-keeping concerning his/her own learning progress in your classes?	Not at all	A Little	Consi-derably	A lot	Greatly
	1	2	3	4	5

Comment:

9. To what extent is the learner encouraged to assess himself/herself in your classes?		Not at all	A Little	Consi-derably	A lot	Greatly
	Weekly	1	2	3	4	5
	Monthly	1	2	3	4	5
	Annually	1	2	3	4	5

Comment:

End of the Questionnaire

Thank you for filling in the questionnaire

APPENDIX C

Interview Questions for Learners

1. How would you describe teachers at your institute? What are their general characteristics?
2. What is your teachers' attitude to instructional innovation? Do they include new instructional methods and techniques into their teaching?
3. What do you think are your teachers' expectations of you?
4. What do you think is your teachers' primary role as an English language instructor?
5. How would you describe learners at your institute? What are their general characteristics? Do you think you are typical of learners at your institute?
6. What are your expectations of your teachers?
7. How would you describe an effective language learner?
8. To what extent should the learner be involved in making decisions on the course content? Can you explain your answer?
9. To what extent should the learner be involved in classroom management? Can you explain your answer?
10. How do you feel trust and confidence between teachers and learners can best be created?
11. A well-known educator said that the role of higher education is helping students "Learn how to learn". Would you agree with this? How might you modify or change this statement?