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### The Importance of Autonomy in Enhancing Communication Skills for The Learners

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**Abstract---** Autonomy is a key factor in almost every field. Everyone desires to do their work with certain liberty and everyone has the right to make their choices in the process of completing their task. Autonomy has first appeared in the field of foreign language teaching and it has been utilized by the learners of foreign countries for decades. The notion of autonomy has become popular and it has become an inevitable feature in the field of education since it encourages the learners to motivate themselves in initiating and framing their goals. Autonomy intrinsically implies freedom of choice. But this freedom of choice is hampered in a teacher centered learning environment. The teacher centered learning is considered as an outmoded approach and the environment that nurtures such a kind of learning method is undoubtedly a hindrance in the acquisition of communication skills. This paper throws limelight on the importance of autonomy for teachers as well as learners, the difficulties in implementing this method, the practical benefits of practising and nurturing autonomy and the methods of practising autonomy to reach the desired goal.

**Keywords:** Autonomy, Communication Skills, Inevitable, Outmoded Approach, Hindrance, Nurture

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#### I. INTRODUCTION

The education system in India is competitive and trains rigorously to withstand fierce competition on a worldwide scale. We must likewise admit that our Indian education system calls for a “makeover”. It is too much information oriented, which leaves little scope for creativity, inventions and self learning- the main features that come under the umbrella head called “autonomy”. Here comes the question of employability of the present day engineering graduates and the role of autonomy in making them employable. Acquiring professional knowledge alone doesnot help the engineering graduates to compete in the labour market. Developing communication skills also plays a key role in moulding one into a successful professional and it has become mandatory to inculcate the ability to apply them in technical communication. Practising autonomy wherever possible and achieving the desired goal has become the need of the hour. Henceforth, Academicians and researchers have started encouraging the idea of learner and teacher autonomy in language classroom. The autonomy of teachers and students will create an amicable environment that paves way to foster their individual style of learning. The concept of autonomy helps both the learner and

the teacher to take control over their learning and teaching. Further, it helps to improve and accelerate their progress.

## **II. WHY IS AUTONOMY IMPORTANT?**

Autonomy gives scope to think and act freely. It helps the learner in setting their goals and in judging their own proficiency. Assessing oneself is important than inheriting knowledge mechanically which obviously promotes rote learning. In fact, self-assessment paves way to evaluate one's own work and to set their goal efficiently. These traits can be best possessed only through autonomy. An autonomous learner will know how to identify his needs, efficiency, conviction and the ability to assess them. Hence, autonomy is the right choice to shape the learner in the process of learning. Similarly, teacher autonomy is equally important in moulding a learner. A teacher is a facilitator meant to promote learner autonomy. The role of the teacher does not alone stop with imparting knowledge and developing them professionally but it is also their duty to motivate the learner to take initiative in their own learning and support them in achieving their dreams. Thus, the teacher is a key to activate the autonomous learning system which enables the learner to set up their learning objective, to select their own resources and to take responsibilities in their own field of learning.

## **III. DIFFICULTIES IN IMPLEMENTING LEARNER AND TEACHER AUTONOMY**

Teaching and learning are the two important aspects in the process of learning. Developing learner and teacher autonomy is a lengthy process which involves lot of practical difficulties. In many educational institutions, teachers are not allowed to be creative nor encouraged to be innovative. Teachers function like programmed robots and carry out mechanical activities dictated by the head of the institution. They are not decision-makers but executors of the decisions made. The present education system pressurizes the teacher to take control over the students either by disciplinary technique or by threat. They focus only on marks/grades and prepare students only for exams and not for life. Autonomy, creativity, innovation and professional development are not found in their lexicon. In India, there are many good educational institutions where students and teachers do enjoy academic freedom but this is just a drop in an ocean compared to the numerous institutions. Developing a flexible teaching methodology through autonomy alone promotes a conducive learning environment. So, autonomy for a teacher and learner always go hand in hand. Without any one of the autonomies; it is hardly possible to achieve the other.

## **IV. PRACTICAL BENEFITS OF PRACTISING AND NURTURING AUTONOMY**

Autonomy need not necessarily be considered as a new approach to education, rather it has to be seen as a new way of living. As a way of living, autonomy can be exercised in any sphere of life and by people of any walks of life and its benefits can be wide ranging. The benefits that are specifically experienced by the teacher and learner are noteworthy. These benefits begin with the learning environment and the methods of learning. Autonomous learning provides students with the opportunity to teach themselves the most essential skill to become lifelong learners: knowledge of how to learn. It teaches students how to learn, rather than what to learn. If students can learn the 'how,' the content or topic can be interchangeable. The array of benefits that can be enjoyed are as follows:

- Autonomous learning promotes the natural development of self confidence, initiative, perseverance and life satisfaction. This method of learning greatly increases a person's ability to make sound, intelligent, self-affirming choices when the stakes are high. The more practice people have with making their own decisions when they are young, the more likely they are to grow into mature, sensible, healthy, productive and compassionate adults.

- Learning through autonomy provides opportunities to pursue a far wider range of interests than is possible in a typical educational set up with its pre-defined curriculum, fixed schedule and inability to accommodate the needs and interests of individuals. Even those topics that are within the usual curriculum can be explored in greater depth, and more meaningfully in autonomous learning.
- Autonomy helps to foster and reinforce a collaborative learning environment. Whether the students engage in the learning process independently or collaboratively, there is a constant cross-pollination of ideas and sharing that takes place. This collaborative learning environment supported by autonomy in turn provides students with an individual and personalized space to create, discuss, negotiate, design, explore and do what they decide will best serve their goals and values.
- Autonomy broadens students' abilities to communicate with one another and the world. Provided the freedom and independence to learn, students can naturally comprehend the what, when and how of communication, especially speech and thus become effective communicators.
- Students become comfortable asking for help. Whether it be asking peers or teachers for guidance on how best to seek out information, students are not ashamed to not know something. Once autonomy starts taking an upper hand, students begin to see the value in leveraging whatever resources they need to help them, and find strength in asking for help.
- Autonomous learners tend to possess creative problem-solving skills. Our education system is such that students won't always have immediate access to the tools or resources they first envision, so they need to be flexible and adaptive thinkers. The flexibility and adaptation teaches them to be more comfortable with limitations and embrace the challenge of being resourcefully innovative, meeting their goals with what they have, and gives a sense of pride in doing so.
- Students become highly proficient in a range of technological applications. They are often initially inspired by their peers, so when one student thinks divergently and tries something new, others follow and innovate off the original. As a result, the amount of peer-to-peer upskilling builds a dynamic learning environment.
- Autonomy provides a renewed and genuine passion for learning. The locus of control and influence shifts back to the students in an independent learning environment. As a result, they begin to have greater self-determination and freedom over their learning.

## V. METHODS OR STRATEGIES FOR DEVELOPING AUTONOMY

Developing autonomy involves learning how to learn, and is a gradual and sometimes difficult process. In order to become autonomous, learners need to be exposed to a range of useful learning activities and have the opportunity to evaluate and reflect on these. This can be achieved only by a combination of efforts by the teacher, peers and the student. We, as educators, have a crucial role to not only educate our students but also to instil skills into them that will help them succeed in a life outside of education. By encouraging our students to become autonomous learners we are preparing them for life in higher education and beyond. Some learning methods can foster as well as hinder the development of autonomy and acquisition of soft skills. So, it is important to clearly differentiate the do's and don'ts of developing responsible and autonomous learners.

### A. DO'S

- First, frame the learning environment in such a manner as to provide opportunities for the learner to take control of their learning, which could include opportunities for peer and self assessment or negotiating activities with students. This conducive learning environment that promotes autonomy can be created only by a teacher who can think and act independently.

- Learners may initially lack the ability to identify goals or plan their learning. Once this inability is perceived, the teacher can assist by scaffolding the learning, suggesting suitable goals, or setting or negotiating a timetable or plan.
- Stop spoon feeding. Students have become accustomed to teachers telling them everything they need to do and the way in which they must do it to the extent that they are unable to think for themselves. There is always an underlying fear that what they think will be wrong. The only solution lies in developing independence, but if they are not given the option to think it will be difficult for them to differentiate between the right and the wrong.
- Increase the responsibility. To feel truly motivated and ambitious, and to succeed and do well, students need to be given responsibility where they feel like they are placed in a position of leadership and guidance to others and doing this can increase autonomy and engagement. The empowerment and confidence triggered by being held responsible for something gives the student the impression that they are trusted and this will increase their motivation.
- Start early. The earlier the learners are exposed to autonomous learning practices, the better they will do and the faster they will learn to trust their own instincts and move towards their desired goals.
- Begin new learning tasks with opportunities for students to ask questions and get help from their teacher or peers if they are having difficulty understanding the concepts or performances required of them.
- Help students deal with inevitable disappointment that comes when they don't perform as they hoped they would. For example, students can be taught strategies for using mistakes as learning opportunities and for controlling the negative emotions that can interfere with learning.

## **B. DON'TS**

- Link the successes or failures in learning to students' lack of ability or intelligence. Students can't change fixed abilities, but they can change learning habits and behaviors like effort and persistence.
- Compare individual or groups of students with each other in terms of how quickly or well they learn new material. Learning is an individual process and students need to feel good about how they approach and engage in learning tasks.
- Pair struggling students with students of higher ability or greater knowledge and skills, as this may result in students becoming dependent rather than independent or autonomous learners.
- Engage in teaching strategies that allow students to be passive. Instead engage their curiosity and promote active learning. Passive teaching strategies provide students with the answers and give them little voice or choice. So allow students to pursue their own questions or solve their own problems with skillful feedback from teachers or adults which support their learning and skill development.
- Remove the teacher support too quickly or completely as this can be demotivating if the students are not ready with the process of developing necessary skills.

The above mentioned do's and don'ts are specifically designed for teachers and are meant to be followed and practised by teachers in order to achieve the optimum level of autonomy which in turn can promote the acquisition of communication skills for learners.

## **VI. CONCLUSION**

Autonomy is primarily a state of mind, an attitude to life. It has to do with the belief in one's potential, self-esteem, open-mindedness, self-respect and respect for others, etc. These attitudes have to be first embodied and then practised by the teachers in order to make the learners comprehend the

notion of autonomy. Only after understanding the concept of learner autonomy, teachers can motivate students to develop learning strategies by raising learner awareness. Once the concept of learner autonomy is well comprehended, the teacher has to update himself with the theory, methods and approaches, and significance about how to cultivate learner autonomy. The idea of developing learner autonomy is intrinsically linked with teacher autonomy. Only a teacher who is an independent thinker can make learners independent. So the teacher has to accommodate and make full use of the teaching environment or context to bring about the desired result of achieving autonomy. Last but not least, teachers should realize that it is worth assimilating learner autonomy into their pedagogy. Unless this realization dawns upon them, not even a single milestone can be achieved. It is quite hard to digest the fact that autonomy is likely to be hard won and its permanence cannot be guaranteed; and the learner who displays a high degree of autonomy in one area may be non-autonomous in another.

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