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Stimulating learner autonomy in English language education : a curriculum innovation study in a Vietnamese context

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CHAPTER 3

STIMULATING LEARNER AUTONOMY

In the previous chapter, the context of teaching and learning English in secondary and higher education in Vietnam was discussed. The discussion revealed that stimulating learners' autonomy and communicative competence is what an English as a Foreign Language (EFL) curriculum should aim at. This chapter discusses the concept of learner autonomy. The first section begins with the review of definitions of learner autonomy. The second section discusses the pedagogical measures that aim to support the development of learner autonomy. The third section summarizes the characteristics of a curriculum that might fit the aim of stimulating learner autonomy the best.

1. LEARNER AUTONOMY

1.1 Learner autonomy: What is it?

Central to definitions of learner autonomy are learners' (1) *cognitive factors* (ability or capacity), (2) *affective factors* (attitudes, willingness, readiness, self-confidence), (3) *meta-cognitive factors* (setting learning goals, choosing learning materials, planning learning activities, monitoring and self-evaluating progress), and (4) *social factors* (working in co-operation with others which promote interactions and scaffolds, a condition for enhancing one's independent problem-solving skills).

Cognitive factors. Some definitions of autonomy (Holec, 1981; Little, 1991; Benson, 2001; Vanijdee, 2003) take learners' ability or capacity into account. Autonomy in Holec's definition is

"the ability to take charge of one's own learning. This ability has a potential capacity to act in a given situation – in our case learning – and not the actual behavior of an individual in that situation." (Holec, 1981:3).

In this definition, autonomy is the ability, not actions from the learner. Vanijdee (2003) extends the concept of learner autonomy as a capacity – a construct of attitudes and ability that allows learners to take more responsibility for their own learning. In Little's (1991) definition, autonomy is a capacity for detachment, critical reflection, decision-making and independent actions. Little's (ibid.) and Holec's (ibid.) descriptions concur in that learner autonomy is the ability to take charge of one's own learning. However, Little's definition involves an element of awareness in that capacity (Reinders, 2000). This awareness results from critical reflections on

one's learning. In sum, cognitively, learner autonomy has been defined as the ability to take charge of one's own learning with a certain degree of awareness.

Affective factors. Other definitions of learner autonomy take learners' affective attributes such as learners' attitudes, willingness, readiness and self-confidence into account. In Wenden's (1987) definition, autonomous learners are willing to take the responsibility for learning. They see themselves as having the crucial role in their language learning. They are self-confident learners, believing in their ability to learn, to self-direct and to manage their learning. Chan (2001) adds the quality of readiness to learn autonomously to describe autonomous learners. Ho & Crookall (1995) view learner attitudes as one of the variables to define learner autonomy besides what they label as self-knowledge (i.e., what one needs to learn) and skills and knowledge about the learning process and the nature of language.

Meta-cognitive factors. What "taking charge of" or "taking responsibility for one's own learning" means in certain contexts of teaching and learning should be explained clearly (Benson, 1996; 1997). Learner autonomy should be defined as *the ability or capacity to take control (rather than responsibility) over the management of one's learning* (i.e., learning processes, resources and language use). This control over learning regards *learner's involvement in setting goals, defining content and working out evaluation mechanism for assessing achievement and progress* (Little, 1991: 91). The extent to which learners demonstrate their control over learning is manifested through their ability to use a set of tactics in learning: setting goals, choosing materials and tasks, planning practice opportunities and monitoring and evaluating progress (Cotterall, 1995). Dam (1995) stresses the learners' needs and purposes, reflected in learning goals set by learners themselves. Definitions taking meta-cognitive factors highlight the learners' self-regulation skills: *Planning, monitoring, and evaluating*, the critical qualities to be communicatively competent language learners (see section 1, chapter 4 of this book).

Social factors. Dam (1995) includes the social skills necessary to work in-cooperation with others as a socially responsible person – a quality required of an autonomous learner. Benson (1996) maintains that greater control of learning process, learning resources and language use cannot be achieved by each individual acting alone according to their own preferences. Control is a question of collective decision-making rather than individual choice. This perspective fits second or foreign language learning contexts: The more social interactions with negotiations of meaning are observed, the more language learning via language use may occur. Researchers in the social-cultural approach (see section *Designing tasks* in chapter 4 of this book) strongly support the claim that proper and in-time *scaffolds* support learners' active involvement and stimulates their learner autonomy (Little, 1991). Social interactions manifested in these scaffolds mediate learning. Moreover, cooperation in assisting each other to reflect on task execution and language learning is necessary for developing meta-cognition.

To summarize, the concept of learner autonomy has been described with four factors: *Cognitive, affective, social and meta-cognitive*. However, no definition of

learner autonomy in language learning has considered all four factors. For this reason, it is essential to work toward a theoretical model of how an autonomous language learner should be. As a working definition, we proposed

an autonomous language learner is defined as the one who leads positive attitudes to autonomous language learning (i.e., willing and ready to assume her role in success in learning as crucial), is motivated to learn the language (i.e., with a communicative purpose) and is able to take control over her own learning (i.e., planning, monitoring and evaluating their communicative and learning acts) to work independently and in cooperation with others (Trinh & Rijlaarsdam, 2003).

In other words, learners take control of the affective, cognitive, and social processes in their learning.

1.2 *Learner autonomy in Asian contexts*

The cultural background of learners has often been viewed as a *hindrance* in promoting autonomy (Palfreyman, 2004). Two features supposed to hinder the development of learner autonomy in Asian contexts are (1) *collectivism*, and (2) *de facto acceptance of relationships based on power and authority* which results in avoiding making the teacher lose face (Littlewood, 1999).

Little (1996; 2000a) argues that people become independent via interdependence. In the light of Vygotsky's (1978) zone of proximal development, one might achieve independent problem-solving skills under adult guidance or in cooperation with more capable peers. This guidance (or scaffold), the manifestation of interdependence, is commonly found in the cultures of collectivism. This is to say *collectivism* should not be treated as a hindrance to learner autonomy development. Smith (2001) also argues for the validity of learner autonomy in Asian settings. To him, group-based approaches are more likely to be appropriate in Asian contexts than completely individualized learning.

In the cultures influenced by Confucianism, making teachers lose face is considered as improper behavior. Avoiding making teachers lose face is feasible. Ho and Crookall (1995) give an account of transforming the traditional classroom into a learning environment through a *simulation*, which creates favorable conditions to deal with constraints of promoting learner autonomy presented by the culture through a *simulation* (see Ho & Crookall, 1995). In such a learning environment, learners work together as teams; they will challenge each other and they learn more. From Ho and Crook's (ibid.) proposal, it is feasible to design tasks that create opportunities for students to raise questions, to challenge each other and to solve problems. This task might help learners develop their autonomy, irrespective of their Asian cultural background.

I have argued that in theory *collectivism* and *de facto acceptance of relationships based on power and authority* should not be considered hindrances to the development of learner autonomy in Asian contexts. The *universality* (Crabbe, 1999) of learner autonomy has been empirically proved in some Asian educational contexts. Empirical evidence from Yang (1998), Holden & Usuki (1999), Usuki (2002), Chan (2001) and Vanijdee (2003) support the feasibility of learner autonomy in Asian

contexts. These studies confirm that the *learning environment* (i.e., the role of the teacher and students in the classroom, learning and teaching beliefs) and *teaching materials* influence whether learners are autonomous or not. It is not the case that learners themselves are not autonomous per se.

Holden and Usuki (1999) conducted a preliminary investigation, a questionnaire survey, into learner autonomy in language learning in a Japanese context. Six groups of four or five students each were interviewed in Japanese for approximately one hour. Based on language standardized proficiency measures such as Cambridge PET tests, three groups were defined as high achievers; the other three groups were designated as low achievers. Students of similar levels of ability were placed in groups for the interviews. All participants were encouraged to answer the questions (e.g., about the ideal learning environments, the purpose of classroom learning, the ideal lesson, the bad learning experience, teacher role, learner role, how to learn a foreign language, the most effective way of learning a foreign language, strategies used to learn a foreign language) individually by offering a comment or observation based on feeling, opinion or experience. The interviews were taped, transcribed, analyzed and translated into English. The results correct the misconception that Japanese learners are less autonomous than learners from other cultural backgrounds. The study also indicates that *the learners are not innately passive: it is the educational system that has discouraged learner autonomy*. In another research report, Usuki (2002) emphasized that the teacher's attitudes towards students' independence might hold the key to the development of learner autonomy.

Yang's (1998) study included designing and implementing *language-learning projects* as a major component in a second language course at tertiary level in Taiwan. The attempts were to teach students how to learn and how to become autonomous in their language learning, by combining *learning strategy instruction* with the *content course* of second language acquisition. Students (n=40) participated in the language-learning project; 32 were English majors, the others from departments of sociology, politics, physics and mathematics. The teacher first provided written guidelines for peer-interviews during which students share their language learning backgrounds, experiences and "special tricks" in learning. Students then told their interview-partners' stories to the class, which helps the instructor know more about the learners, raise students' awareness of different learning strategies and create a relaxing learning environment. Next, the teacher used questionnaires to examine students' learning strategies, beliefs, attitudes and preferred learning styles. Then, the teacher explained the concept of learning strategies in detail. To help students prepare their research project proposals, the teacher assigned reading materials relating to how to be a more successful language learner. The teacher introduced the concepts of language proficiency and communicative competence in the next class, and then asked the students to assess their proficiency in the target language. Then, the teacher helped the students set their proficiency objectives based on formal scales and design their own plan for meeting the objectives. The instructor asked the students to keep a weekly diary and write down any (1) self-observations about applying new learning strategies, (2) inner thoughts about readings, or class discussions, and (3) important events in their learning process. The teacher implemented direct instruction and modeled some learning strategies during the course when rele-

vant. The strategies included techniques for taking tests, writing reports, giving oral presentations and reading materials with different purposes. Later, the instructor asked the students to evaluate their effectiveness of their language learning with relation to their established proficiency goal and consider whether learning strategies were helpful in moving towards the goal. The results showed that the course raised the students' awareness of language learning strategies via *explanations, modeling, practice, and integration*. The results also revealed that evaluating the success of the instruction improved the students' use of strategies, taught them how to assess their own language proficiency, to set goals, to evaluate progress and enabled students to experience greater overall autonomy in learning. Two thirds of the 40 students liked the course and class activities. Most appreciated the results of the project.

Chan's (2001) study attempted to explore the learners' attitudes and expectations of language learning, teacher and learner roles, their learning preferences and perception of learner autonomy at tertiary level in Hong Kong. She administered a questionnaire survey to find out what participants think and feel about *what they want to learn* and *how they want to learn*. The study involved a class of 20 second-year language major students on the course "English at the Workplace". Participants' age range is 19-24. They have studied English for 14-18 years in local schools. The study reported five results. *First*, the students were interested in learning English in order to communicate rather than learning the language for its own sake. *Second*, the students suggested a predominant teacher's role in the language learning process and revealed different roles of the teacher as the resource person, the instructor and the facilitator. *Third*, the majority of students (95%) acknowledged the important role that autonomous learning played in the learning process and 85% of students anticipated that they could become more effective learners if they develop the knowledge and skills about the learning process. *Fourth*, a wide range of activities the class favored were language games, role-plays, reading English newspapers, watching English TV and movies, listening to English radios and songs and speaking to native speakers, which are evidences of a strong desire for more exposure to authentic use of the target language. *Fifth*, strong indications of highly positive attitudes towards learning autonomously were shown, higher than one would expect in the local context. The results were encouraging in that students showed a clear understanding of the nature of learner autonomy and awareness of what it requires, without previous autonomous learning experiences or learner training in such direction. In other words, students were ready for learner autonomy and were more amenable to autonomy as an important goal than many teachers and educators expected. Chan's (ibid.) study proposed two guiding principles for designing autonomy-oriented classroom activities. First, there should be much room for students' involvement since this is what they desire. Second, there should be a wide range of learning conditions and group activities to stimulate motivation and interest.

Vanijdee's (2003) study explored learner autonomy in distance education in Thailand by using questionnaires, think-aloud protocols and interviews. The study consists of two parts. In the first part, questionnaires eliciting information on how students deal with self-instructional materials and distance study were distributed to students in an English course in different parts of Thailand. In addition, volunteers

from Bangkok, the most accessible, were invited to join a more in-depth investigation including think-aloud verbal protocols and interviews about the use of language learning strategies. The think-aloud protocols were based on 22 learning tasks taken from a study unit in an English course. Forty students completed the think-aloud protocols. The interviews revealed the data about language learning strategy use and information about how participants sought exposure to the English language, their problem-solving techniques and their attitudes towards learner autonomy. The second part of the study included assessing students' varying degree of learner autonomy manifested in three main areas: *The use of language learning strategies, interaction with the self-instructional materials and the way in which students managed their distance learning.* The results showed that Thai distance language learners in the study displayed varying degrees of learner autonomy, neither absolute autonomy nor total lack of autonomy. There are two distinct groups in this survey ($N = 40$), 21 dynamic distance language learners and 19 self-sufficient distance language learners. Over half of learners of English in Thailand in this study appeared to show a greater degree of autonomy and under half of the learners surveyed were at least self-sufficient distance language learners. The study recommended pedagogical actions towards the development of learner autonomy. *Institutions* must be aware of the significance of autonomy and decide on policy and a definite plan to provide more learning contexts and resources to encourage students to become more dynamic. The *materials and curriculum developers* contribute to the development of learner autonomy through attention to materials design, incorporating activities and tasks that promote skills and awareness of the language learning process. *Tutors* must act as facilitators and mentors to help students to become more autonomous.

From the studies on learner autonomy in Asian contexts, it has been obvious that the educational systems have not created sufficient opportunities for learners to be autonomous. Asian learners are not un-autonomous by nature. The educational systems in Asian contexts should provide students with more room to get involved in their learning. More group activities should be designed to stimulate learners' motivation and interest. It has been observed that learner autonomy is not biased only to Western values. Learner autonomy can be stimulated in non-Western contexts. Which pedagogical actions have been taken so far to stimulate learner autonomy will be discussed in the following sections.

2. STIMULATING LEARNER AUTONOMY

2.1 *Why stimulate learner autonomy*

There are many reasons (e.g., political, socio-cultural, pedagogical) supporting the development of learner autonomy. In this chapter, reasons relating to pedagogical practices in education in general and language education in specific will be discussed.

With the growth of knowledge in the information age of our present-day society, the "filling empty vessels" or "depositing money into banks" teaching paradigm has exposed its limitations in the light of constructivist and social constructivist theories,

which state that knowledge is not there waiting to be learned but rather a process of personal and social construction. Therefore, learning is an active and interactive process of knowledge construction.

No schools or universities can provide its students with all knowledge and skills they will need for their adult lives. It is important for young persons to have an understanding of themselves, an awareness of their environment and how it works and to have learned how to think and learn (Trim, 1988, in McCarthy, 2000; Dam, 2000). This will increase students' self-esteem to cope with ever-changing life and engage in new learning experiences as socially responsible persons. In other words, the goal of education is life-long learning or learner autonomy (Wenden, 1987; Ho & Crookall, 1995). In language education, it is a fact that no language schools or programs can teach students all that they need for their communication outside the classroom. Learning a language is a life-long endeavor that can be done mostly by the learners themselves. They are the ones who know their communicative needs best and the ones who know what needs to be done and how to do it to achieve their goals. Taking learners' roles as crucial in their learning and stimulating learner autonomy should be the aim of language education because autonomous language learners would be truly effective language learners and language users (Little, 2000a).

Research found a mismatch between what teachers expect students to learn and what students really learn. While the teacher is busily teaching one thing, the learner is very often focusing on something else. Second language will proceed most efficiently if learners are allowed to develop and exercise autonomy (Nunan, 1997; 2000).

2.2 *How to stimulate learner autonomy*

The notion of *control over learning* is the seed of autonomy (Benson, 2001). The pedagogical task is how to enable learners to take control over their learning, namely control over *learning management* (i.e., managing the planning, monitoring and evaluating learning), *learning content* (i.e., what to learn), and *cognitive processes* (i.e., reflection, meta-cognitive knowledge).

The following sections will describe approaches aiming at stimulating learner autonomy or the *control over learning*. Besides the provision of opportunities for the development of learner autonomy such as resource centers or computer-assisted language learning (CALL), approaches that aim at stimulating learner autonomy include *provision of choice*, *change of teachers and learners' roles* and *learner development*, which are respectively labeled curriculum-based, teacher-based and learner-based approaches (Benson, 2001).

2.2.1 *Curriculum-based approach*

This approach attempts to promote learner autonomy by involving learners in decision-making processes at the level of the curriculum as a whole. Central to this approach is the pedagogy of *choice* in which learners can decide the learning content

(*what*) and learning method (*how*) at the level of the institutional curriculum. *Learner choice* (Lee, 1998; Cotterall, 2000) brings about learners' *decision-making, flexibility, adaptability* and *modifiability*. Learners learn how to make informed choices if they are entitled to *reflect* on their language learning experiences.

Educators and researchers (McDevitt, 2004; Esch, 1996; Müller-Verweyen, 1999) support the promotion of this approach to stimulating learner autonomy. The result of all education should be an independent learner. McDevitt (2004) leads this idea back to philosophies of education from Socrates and Freire. She views learning as a process with a student capable of taking decisions, making choices and above all asking questions. Desire to know must come from the learner. The curriculum can, indeed must encourage this desire to ensure that students will achieve a level of independence which takes them far beyond the demands of a particular curriculum or the requirements of tests or assignments to the point where instruction ends and education truly begins. Esch (1996) adds more values into stimulating learner autonomy by providing learners with an environment supportive of autonomy. Such an environment would be characterized by *choice, flexibility, adaptability, modifiability, reflectivity* and *shareability*. In addition, materials need to be designed to encourage autonomous learning by prompting learners to adopt their own tactics and to reflect on the learning process (Müller-Verweyen, 1999).

An example of stimulating learner autonomy in action is Dam's (1995) work in a Danish secondary school. Aiming at changing students' tired-of-school attitudes, which was supposed to lead to the general lack of interest in learning English, Dam (*ibid.*) tried to involve students (or in her words 'forced them to be involved') in the decisions concerning the choice of classroom activities and learning materials. Dam (*ibid.*) realized that giving learners a share of responsibility for planning and conducting teaching-learning activities caused them to be actively involved and led to better learning and increased their capacity to evaluate the learning process. In this way, *awareness of how to learn* facilitates and influences what is being learned and gives an improved insight into how to learn. Dam's results seem encouraging that students who spent much time learning English by translating from Danish to English could perform so incredibly well in spoken English, even though they were in the first year of learning (Little, 1996). Dam's practical experiences demonstrate that the development of independent thoughts and actions arises most effectively from pedagogical processes that emphasize *learner choices* through a negotiated curriculum.

Stimulating learner autonomy is the promotion of the acquisition of Barnes' (1976) *action knowledge* instead of *school knowledge* (Little, 2000a). School knowledge is the knowledge presented by teachers and partly grasped by learners, enough to answer the teacher's questions, to do exercises or to answer exam questions. However, it remains someone else's knowledge, not the learners'. If learners never use this knowledge, they will probably forget it. As long as learners use knowledge for their own purposes, they begin to incorporate it into their view of the world, and to use parts of it to cope with the exigencies of living. Once the knowledge becomes incorporated into learners' constructed understanding on which their actions are based, that kind of knowledge has become "action knowledge". In other words, learners construct knowledge based on *their choice* of what works for them most.

According to this view, the growth of action knowledge should play a central role in the theory of learner autonomy. The growth of this autonomy, whether in speech or behavior, requires not only interactions with others but also guidance and supervision (i.e., scaffolds). Vygotsky (1978) developed his theory of "zone of proximal development" (ZPD) to explain how we might arrange the environment to make it possible for the child to progress from one level of development to the next. He defined the ZPD as the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers (Vygotsky, 1978: 86). The effectiveness of the curriculum for learner choice depends on teachers' and peers' scaffolds that support learners in the decision-making process.

To summarize, the curriculum developers and teachers arrange situations in which autonomy can be exercised. The learner must actually be encouraged to do the exercising with some initial assurance from the teacher (Ho & Crookall, 1995). Learning can only start from the learners themselves. In the field of language learning, the learner can learn by exploring her communicative needs, by choosing what and how to learn to fulfill those communicative needs and by reflecting on choices and as necessary, to make more informed choices in the future. In other words, only taking steps toward autonomy and exercising that autonomy, the learner can be and become autonomous. The task of curriculum developers and instructors is to assist learners to do so.

2.2.2 *Teacher-based approach*

Within this approach, the role of teachers is to pass control over learning to learners. This brings along new roles of the teacher as Johnson, Delarche, Marshall, Wurr, & Edwards (1998: 80) explains,

... When students are compelled to assume greater responsibility for directions their learning will take, they will gradually learn to see themselves as the controllers of their own learning. Learning is seen as self-initiated and not other-initiated. Therefore, the role of the teachers changes. They are not presenters of language elements as lesson planners; autonomy shifts the teacher more into the role of counselors...

Prominent authors in proposing how to pass control of learning to learners approach are Scharle and Szabo (2000). They see stimulating learner autonomy as a gradual process, divided into three phases. Through learning activities, (1) learners need to be aware of the nature of language learning and their contribution to learning (i.e., raising awareness), then (2) they need some practice in their new attitudes as responsible learners (i.e., changing attitudes), and finally (3) they will be ready to take over some roles from the teacher and enjoy the freedom that comes along with their responsibility for learning (i.e., taking responsibility).

2.2.3 *Learner-based approach*

Learner-based approach or *learner development* (Benson, 2001) aims at observing the production of behavioral and psychological changes that will enable learners to take greater control over their learning. The approach has come from the traditions of self-directed language learning (SDLL) and learner strategies in language learning (LSLL) (Wenden, 2002) in Europe and North America respectively. In terms of educational goal and learning objectives, there are differences between the European and North American trend. In Europe, one aims at learner autonomy as its educational goal and self-directed learning is the realization of learners' potential for autonomy. In the US, one focuses on successful learners, those who could approach the task of language learning completely and effectively. Self-directed learning requires learners to learn how to plan, monitor and evaluate their learning tasks and success in language learning requires the learners to learn strategies and be able to use the strategies to deal with the difficulties learners face. The future direction for learner development is the integration of the two trends. Proponents of SDLL (i.e., Dickenson, 1987) include efficient learning as one of the stated aims of self-instruction and proponents of LSLL refer to the goal of learning strategy instruction as the promotion of overall self-direction (i.e., Oxford, 1990).

The two main issues are which strategies support learners to take control over learning management and cognitive processes, and how learners can acquire these strategies so that they use them to cope with the act of learning a language outside the classroom. The following sections will present (1) strategies to develop control over learning management, and (2) approaches to learner development.

Strategies to develop control over learning management. The most influential research into learning strategies in language learning was conducted by O'Maley and Chamot (1990). They interviewed groups of secondary school ESL learners and classified reported strategies into three groups: *Metacognitive strategies*, *social strategies* and *cognitive strategies*.

Metacognitive strategies are mental operations for the self-management of learning. O'Maley and Chamot (1990) proposed seven groups of metacognitive activities, which are manifestations of *planning for learning* (i.e., the learner asks herself questions: "What am I going to learn? What do I want to learn? How can I learn that? Which strategies can I apply to achieve what I have planned to learn?"), *monitoring the learning task* (i.e., the learner asks herself questions: "Am I achieving my objectives? Should I change the strategies I have used?") and *evaluating how well one has learned* (i.e., the learner asks herself the questions: "How did I execute the task? In what areas can I improve my performance? How can I improve my performances?"). In short, these strategies concern *thinking about the learning process*. They found metacognitive strategies had the most significant contribution to language learning success. This necessarily implies that students should be encouraged to think about the language learning process, to identify their own goals and to work out what kinds of language learning activities are going to help them to achieve the goals they set. The more autonomous students are, the more successful they are likely to be at language learning.

Social and affective strategies involve the ways in which learners interact with others and control themselves in order to enhance their learning. Social strategies are manifested in (1) learners' asking questions for clarification, asking for correction, (2) cooperating with peers, with users of the target language, and (3) empathizing with others (e.g., developing cultural understanding, becoming aware of others' thoughts and feelings). Social strategies aim at strengthening cooperation among learners and group cohesion. Affective strategies include *lowering one's anxiety* (i.e., enhancing self-confidence), *encouraging oneself* (i.e., enhancing motivation) and *taking one's emotional temperature*.

Cognitive strategies. A key component of autonomy is *reflection*, a cognitive process,

“...an active, persistent, and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in the light of the grounds that support it and the further conclusions to which it tends constitutes reflective thought” (Dewey, 1933 in Benson, 2001).

Little (1997) contends that *conscious reflection* on the learning process is a feature of autonomous learning. To Little (1996b), discussions required for *reflection* and *analysis* are crucial for the development of learner autonomy which can only come from the ability to interact with others, to discuss, negotiate so that learning processes are made explicit. *Reflection through interaction* is a favorite form of reflection which must be promoted. The results of this form of reflection are two fold. First, learners have the opportunities to use the target language to communicate authentically with their peers about their learning process. Second, learners' self-regulation is strengthened.

The learner-based approach to stimulating learner autonomy has included the four building blocks proposed by Scharle and Szabo (2000) for the development of learners' responsibility and autonomy: (1) Motivation and self-confidence (i.e., *affective strategies*), (2) monitoring and evaluation (i.e., *metacognitive strategies*), (3) cooperation and group cohesion (i.e., *social strategies*), and (4) learning strategies (i.e., *cognitive strategies*).

I have just presented the strategies for control over language management and over cognitive processes, now I move on to discuss the approaches that are aimed at helping learners *acquire* the strategies they find work for their learning.

Approaches to learner development. In this section, I first present and then explain the five common approaches concerning learner development. Finally, I conclude which approaches fit the aim of stimulating learner autonomy.

Different approaches to learner development include (1) explicit instructions or direct advice on language-learning strategies and techniques via learners' manuals, (2) training based on research findings on the model of a *good language learner*, (3) encouraging learners to experiment with strategies and discover which work well for them, (4) integrated approaches treating learner training as a by-product of language learning, and (5) self-directed approaches in which learners are encouraged to train themselves through reflection on self-directed learning activities.

Giving explicit instructions of direct advices on language learning strategies to learners (referred to as approach 1) tends to be prescriptive and is not necessary

based on research (Benson, 2001). In the light of this approach, learners are considered as “empty vessels” in which knowledge might be filled in. As argued in section 2.1 in this chapter, the “fill-in empty vessels” teaching paradigm has shown its limitations within the constructivist and social constructivist theories claiming that knowledge is not there to be learned and learning is a personal and social construction of knowledge. Training based on research on the model of a good language learner (referred to as approach 2) involves an implicit molding of the learner to approved patterns of behavior. This molding is incompatible with the aim of enabling the learners to self-direct their own learning. The approach that encourages the learners “to experiment with strategies” (referred to as approach 3) aims to help learners consider the factors that affect their learning and discover the learning strategies that suit them best. However, this approach tends to limit the learners to a number of given strategies and from experimenting with these strategies learners discover what work for them best. The integrated approaches (referred to as approach 4) treat learner development as a by-product of language learning. The aim of learner development in the light of approach 4 is to train the learners first and then teach them the language, but to teach them to communicate in the target language while helping them to learn and think about their learning (see Legutke & Thomas, 1991). As stated in the section strategies to develop learners’ control over learning management, reflection is a crucial activity for the development of learner autonomy. In this respect, the self-directed approaches (referred to as approach 5) fit the aim of stimulating learner autonomy well because within this approach learners are provided with the opportunities to train themselves by reflecting on their self-directed learning activities.

Though fully aware that the effectiveness of learner development may depend largely on the contexts in which they are taught and applied, through explicit instructions and direct advice (as by approach 1) or guidance to discover approved norms or visual and verbal images of successful language learners (as by approach 2) tend to place learners into a position which does not acknowledge them as individuals with their own linguistic background. The range of options from which students are invited to choose (as by approach 3) does not reflect learners’ genuine choice of what they need and how they would like to equip themselves with these strategies to fulfill their learning goals. Therefore, among the five aforementioned approaches to learner development, *integrated* and *self-directed approaches* (approaches 4 and 5) seem to be best in line with the goal of stimulating learner autonomy.

3. SUMMARY

Autonomous language learners take over, from teachers, the control of the affective, cognitive and social processes in learning (i.e., resulting in positive attitudes to autonomous learning, to motivation to use and learn the target language and to control their learning through working independently and cooperatively). To accommodate learners to take control of these processes, the curriculum-based approach proposes providing learners with *choices* of learning content and learning methodology.

To achieve the aim of developing learner autonomy, the teacher-based approach proposes passing *the control of learning* to learners and the learner-based approach suggests including *learner development* into the curriculum. It could be inferred that the pedagogy of choice is demonstrated in the three approaches to developing learner autonomy. Choice would allow learners to take control of their learning. Choice would allow learners to choose learning strategies that fit the best. To Little (2000a), the more autonomous language learners are, the better language learners/users they become. Stimulating learner autonomy is aimed at stimulating communicative competence. The pedagogical question is which teaching method fits the aim of stimulating learner autonomy and communicative competence the best. I will discuss this in the next chapter.

