FACILITATIVE ASPECTS OF LEARNER’S AUTONOMY

Abstract. In the article it was shown that autonomy, generally, was not seen as a method or a behavior to be taught a learner. On the contrary, it is understood as innate part of human nature which is usually exercised over different areas of life not only in the aspect of language learning. By nature, we are all autonomous from birth since we fully, however, not always consciously, control what we learn during developmental learning stages. Frequently, even young children display their autonomy clearly when they choose to learn particular undesirable behavior, for example, saying inappropriate words. As can be seen, the notion of autonomy is not a recent “fashion”, but it has always been present in a human life.

We presented facilitative aspects of learner’s autonomy: autonomy is a construct of capacity; autonomy involves a willingness on the part of the learner to take responsibility for their own learning; the capacity and willingness of learners take such a responsibility is not necessarily innate; complete autonomy is an idealistic goal; there are some main degrees of autonomy; the degrees of autonomy are unstable and variable; autonomy is not simply a matter of placing learners in situations where they have to be independent; developing autonomy requires conscious awareness of the learning process – i.e. conscious reflection and decision-making; promoting autonomy is not simply a matter of teaching strategies; autonomy can take place both inside and outside the classroom; autonomy has a social as well as an individual dimension; the promotion of autonomy has a political as well as psychological dimension; autonomy is interpreted differently by different cultures.

Facilitative aspects of learner’s autonomy amaze us with their results: learners recognize and accept the need to organize the activity in an environment of interpersonal communication, facilitating personal development and providing constructive personal changes; they develop skills of empathic comprehension; they are interested by participants in creating the conditions for the formation of meaningful learning and personal development as a whole as a result of restructuring of personal attitudes in the process of interpersonal interaction; they are aware of their self-sufficiency. All these numerous situations of interaction of people are carried out through four main methods of interaction: persuasion, imitation, suggestion and infection, which are facilitative in their context.

Persuasion is the process of rationale judgment or inference. Imitation is the reproduction by a person of certain external traits of behavior, manners and actions. Suggestion is the psychological impact of one person on another one, calculated on the uncritical perception of words, thoughts and will expressed by them. Infection is the process of transferring of the emotional state from one individual to another, in addition to semantic effect itself. When all these methods of interaction are brought into action, the educational product, as a rule, is distinguished by a creative, non-standard approach and, what is the most important, they are always in demand by students.

Key words: facilitative aspects, facilitating personal development, learner’s autonomy, persuasion, imitation, suggestion, infection, learning stages, semantic effect, creative approach, non-standard approach.

Problem’s statement. Autonomy, generally, is not seen as a method or a behavior to be taught a learner. On the contrary, it is understood as innate part of human nature which is usually exercised over different areas of life not only in the aspect of language learning. By nature, we are all autonomous from birth since we fully, however, not always consciously, control what we learn during developmental learning stages. Frequently, even young children display their autonomy clearly when they choose to
learn particular undesirable behavior, for example, saying inappropriate words. As can be seen, the notion of autonomy is not a recent “fashion”, but it has always been present in a human life.

**Analysis of recent researches on this problem.** Although a considerable interest in “learner autonomy” has been the matter of the last thirty years, the ideas of learners directing and controlling their own learning emerge even from such an ancient history as Sung Dynasty around the year 1100. As L.Dam claims: “If you are in doubt, think it out by yourself. Do not depend on others for explanation. Suppose there was no one you could ask, should you stop learning? If you could get rid of habit of being dependent on others, you will make your advancement in your study” (Dam, 1995: 51).

As P.Benson puts forward, numerous great thinkers of the past evidently believed in autonomous learning: “You cannot teach a man anything: you can only help him/her find it within himself/herself” (Benson, 2001: 43). J. Evelyn proposes a model of education that respects learner’s natural impulses and inclinations and leaves the learner to experience the natural consequences of their actions (Evelyn, 1999).

Going closer in the history, it is necessary to mention J.H. Jarvis. In the first half of the twenty-first century he and his problem-solving method laid a foundation for constructivist theories that are nowadays proposed as a theoretical basis for autonomy in language education (Jarvis, 2013).

Project method that was expanded in the educational philosophy at the beginning of the twenty-first century by A. Chamot provides many opportunities for autonomous learning as it emphasizes students’ problem solving with “as little teacher direction as it is possible. The teacher is seen more as a facilitator than a deliverer of knowledge and information” and students are allowed and encouraged to direct their own learning by their individual interests (Chamot, 2011).

The term “learner autonomy” has been a “buzz” word in language education for more than thirty years. The origin of this concept goes back to 1971 when the Centre de Recherches et d’Applications Pédagogiques en Langues (CRAPEL) was founded by Yves Châlon, who is the “father” of autonomy, as one of the outcomes of the Council of Europe’s Modern Languages Project (Benson, 2001: 5–8).

The term itself was coined by H.Holec, the successor of Châlon at the position of the CRAPEL leader, in 1981 in his report to the Council of Europe. Although, as H.Holec presents, the first publications on this topic appeared in 1977 (Harding-Esch) and in 1979 (Holec). Nevertheless, the terms used were “individualisation”, “independence” and “self” – these words and terms sustained in the academic discourse until recently mainly in Anglo-French environment. After 1981 academic circles gradually started to adopt the term “learner’s autonomy” and finally by the year 1997 “all titles of books (dealing with the notion of learner’s autonomy) published in that year had “autonomy” as its main component” (Holec, 1981: 6).

So, according to the actuality of our research, the purpose of this article is:
1. To describe the role of autonomy at the classroom.
2. To propose facilitative aspects of learner’s autonomy.
3. To show facilitative role of testing at the English lessons.
4. To describe the role of main methods of interaction: persuasion, imitation, suggestion and infection, which are facilitative in their context.

**Outline of the main material of the research.** At the very beginning the focus of autonomy movement was on education of adults. The self access learning centers were equipped with a rich collection of authentic materials which were meant to develop self-directed learning and autonomy outside the classroom and thus without a teacher. However, P.Benson summarizes the experience of thirty years of these centers as rather questionable: “...there is no necessary relationship between self-instruction and the development of autonomy, and ... under certain conditions self-instructional modes may even inhibit autonomy” (Benson, 2001: 9). Little describes similar experience with two attempts to establish a self-access centre at the Trinity College at Dublin in 1979 and 1982. Both of them faced serious problems, such as students reluctant to come to the centre, students do not know how to learn on their own and the materials offered substituting the role of a teacher and thus leaving only little space for students’ initiative. From 106 students only nine of them completed the two year program leaving Little with a crucial question. How, in fact, do we acquire a language? (Little, 1996: 17) As it appeared, the answer he found in observing his own children and connecting his findings to the Vygotskyi’s theory of the first language acquisition (Виготський, 1982). In addition, encounter with Dam induced changes in Little’s perception of the second language acquisition (Dam, 1995).
Although, the first research focused on developing autonomy in the classroom, Nordic Workshop Report, appeared in 1987 [30, p.6]. It was a significant impact on understanding the notion of autonomy in connections with young learners had the research of Dam (1995). She started her experiment with fostering autonomous behavior as a kind of the last chance matter. She was to teach a mixed-ability class of demotivated and uninterested eleven year-old children at middle school. Her learners, after only one year of English, became real language users. In reaction to Dam’s lecture Little claimed: “This first encounter with Leni Dam led me to revise four of my key beliefs” (Little, 1996: 18). The last trends focus on implementing self-directed, autonomous learning into a curriculum with the help of new technologies. Fostering autonomous learning and getting children involved are seen as the solution of many issues in language education. P.Benson summarizes a recent development: “The deconstruction of conventional language learning classrooms and courses in many parts of the world is thus the third context for growing interest in autonomy in recent years. Indeed, the tendency has been towards a blurring of the distinction between “classroom” and “out-of-class” applications, leading to new and often complex understandings of a role of autonomy in language teaching and learning” (Benson, 2001: 22).

So, we have seen how the notion of learner autonomy has developed through the course of time. At the beginning when speaking about learner’s autonomy researchers had only adult learners in mind. Later, the academic interest shifted to even primary learners’ level. That’s why now we are going to see that the definitions of learner’s autonomy developed as well. Learner’s autonomy is a multilayered concept that is possible to see from numerous perspectives. This resulted in countless attempts to define its facilitative aspects. So, we have to offer the overview of various definitions of learner’s autonomy by different authors. As we see, three different dimensions of learner’s autonomy will be discussed. The main roles are played by terms “take charge”, “control”, “learning process”, “learning management” and “learning content”. The first, the most quoted and the most influential in language education is definitely the Holec’s definition which was developed with adult learners in mind. H.Holec defines autonomy as taking charge of one’s own learning, and then he elaborates on this fairly broad statement. To take charge of one’s own learning is to have and to hold the responsibility for all the decisions concerning all aspects of this learning. That’s why psychological factors of facilitation of learner’s autonomy are: determining the objectives; defining the contents and progressions; selecting methods and techniques have to be used; monitoring the procedure of acquisition properly speaking (rhythm, time, place, etc.); evaluating what has been acquired (Holec, 1981: 17). However, when H.Holec defined learner’s autonomy he did it with adults studying a foreign language in self-access centers in mind. Therefore, it focuses on the technical or methodological aspects of learning that enable students to succeed in such settings (Holec, 1981).

Sinclair suggests 13 aspects of learner’s autonomy which “appear to have been recognized and broadly accepted by the language teaching profession” (see table 1).

### Table 1

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<th>Facilitative aspects of learner’s autonomy</th>
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<td>1. Autonomy is a construct of capacity</td>
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<td>2. Autonomy involves a willingness on the part of the learner to take responsibility for their own learning</td>
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<td>3. The capacity and willingness of learners take such a responsibility is not necessarily innate</td>
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<td>4. Complete autonomy is an idealistic goal</td>
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<td>5. There are some main degrees of autonomy</td>
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<td>6. The degrees of autonomy are unstable and variable</td>
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<td>7. Autonomy is not simply a matter of placing learners in situations where they have to be independent</td>
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<td>8. Developing autonomy requires conscious awareness of the learning process – i.e. conscious reflection and decision-making</td>
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<td>9. Promoting autonomy is not simply a matter of teaching strategies</td>
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<td>10. Autonomy can take place both inside and outside the classroom</td>
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<td>11. Autonomy has a social as well as an individual dimension</td>
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<td>12. The promotion of autonomy has a political as well as psychological dimension</td>
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<td>13. Autonomy is interpreted differently by different cultures</td>
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Autonomous learners have the capacity to determine realistic and reachable goals, select appropriate methods and techniques to be used, monitor their own learning process, and evaluate the progress of their own learning. According to L. Dam, an autonomous learner is an active participant in social processes of learning and an active interpreter of new information in terms of what he/she already and uniquely knows. Autonomous people are intrinsically motivated, perceive themselves to be in control of their decision-making, take responsibility for the outcomes of their actions and have confidence in themselves (Dam, 1995).

Many educational researchers adopted or at least derived his/her own learner’s autonomy definition from Holec’s ideas (Holec, 1981). However, some of the authors deal with different aspects of autonomy as well. D. Little describes his view of autonomy as possessing strong psychological aspects. The researcher sees autonomous behavior as universal, developing a kind of psychological relationship to both language learning process and content, demonstrated not only in the approach to language learning, but transferred to other situations as well (Little, 1996: 111). Nevertheless, P. Benson adds the third dimension to the Holec’s (Holec, 1981) and Little’s (Little, 1996) definitions. He argues that the mentioned ideas underlay the role of testing over the learning content and social aspects of learning. Autonomous learners should, in principle, have the freedom to determine their own goals and purposes if the learning is to be genuinely self-directed. It also has a social aspect, which may involve control over learning situations and call for particular capacities concerned with the learner’s ability to interact with others in the learning process (Benson, 2001: 49).

In conclusion, P. Benson emphasizes: “The political and transformative character of learner’s autonomy which is often absent from definitions of autonomy in language learning”. As P. Benson summarizes, the control over the learning content, materials and processes cannot be achieved by individual choices, but has to be agreed on collectively (Benson, 2001: 50). This view of importance of social interaction corresponds to the Vygotsky’s theory (Вygотsky, 1982) of the first language acquisition. D. Little summarizes similarities between the first and second language acquisition with this theory in mind: “...all human learning may require a social dimension, especially when the object of learning is a language; and it shows how our psychological autonomy derives from social interdependence. It thus provides a general theoretical justification for the central role that Leni Dam assigns to group activity conducted in the target language. By talking English the whole time her learners gradually become able to think in English, which is fundamental to their developing autonomy as learners and users of the language” (Little, 1996: 20).

As we have seen there are three main dimensions of learner’s autonomy. When dealing with this concept it is necessary to take cognitive, psychological and social aspects into account. However, when considering the definition of learner’s autonomy, it is necessary to look closer at the term “to test”. The term “to test” plays a crucial role in the concept of learner’s autonomy. Being an autonomous learner should involve exercising to test over his/her learning. P. Benson puts forward three levels of testing over language learning. These are cognitive processes, learning management and learning content. In other words, a language learner should always test what he/she learns, how he/she learns and should be able to manage his/her learning. All of the levels are interrelated and thus is equally important. So, we’ll describe facilitative role of testing at the English lessons (Benson, 2001: 50).

**Testing over cognitive processes.**

Benson (2001) describes testing over cognitive processes in terms of three particular mental processes. These are attention, reflection and metacognitive knowledge. The central idea of the attention concept is that “learners must first demonstrate conscious apprehension and awareness of a particular linguistic form before any processing of it can take place” (86–98). As Benson summarizes Schmid’s and Tomlin and Villa’s theories “although contextual factors undoubtedly influence attention, language learners are in principle able to test what they attend to in linguistic input” (88). As Benson concludes, testing over learning begins with the conscious focus of the learner (90).

Reflection is very often seen as a crucial aspect in fostering learner’s autonomy. Not only it provides a cognitive basis for testing over management, but it may and should lead to deep changes in the learner’s autonomy. As Benson (2001) points out these changes may be “difficult and even painful” (92). Reflection should include both, beliefs and practice, and many authors suppose it should be rather implemented gradually than imposed (94–95). According to Holec, “deep reflection on beliefs and
practices interacts with the learner’s expanding knowledge base in the development of autonomy” (Holec, 1981: 95). As Benson states, it is even possible to claim that the autonomous learner is the one capable of working reflection (95).

Metacognitive knowledge or teaching to learn plays a central role in learner’s training in autonomy. If the psychological goal is a less dependent learner then the learner has to know how to learn. As Little (1996) claims the learning metacognitive knowledge and learning the target language are two inseparable parts of the process of learning. In fact, proficiency in the target language goes hand in hand with the development of metacognitive knowledge (98). When summarizing the importance of testing over the cognitive processes, which according to Little lies in developing a kind of psychological relationship to both the process and content of learning, we have to take into account one issue. When carrying out the learner’s training the steps should be taken gradually and rather on a voluntary basis than was imposed. Otherwise, as Little warns the learners will put on “the mask of autonomy” being able to perform the set of required steps, however “they will not necessarily possess the cognitive capacities that will make these actions systematic or effective ones” (Little, 1996: 98).

Let us describe testing over learning management.

Testing over learning management involves such behaviors that enable learners to plan, organize and evaluate their learning. At the level of learning management testing over learning is directly observable as the conscious exercising of various learning strategies. P.Benson gives detailed description about three main categories of language learning strategies. These are cognitive, metacognitive and affective/social strategies (Benson, 2001: 81). Chamot distinguishes two main categories of language learning strategies. These are metacognitive strategies and task based strategies. Task-based strategies are then differentiated into four more categories. The names of the categories are given in terms of commands or recommendations. These are Use what you know, Use your imagination, Use your organizational skills and Use a variety of resources. Chamot’s publication “The Elementary Immersion Learning Strategies Resource Guide” offering the comprehensive description of the implementation of strategy-based instruction will be used in the practical part of this paper as a foundation for the learners’ strategy training (Chamot, 2011).

Let us show the content of testing over language content.

According to Benson exercising to testing over the language content has strong social and political accent. Testing over the content requires more than any other aspect of autonomy that teachers and education authorities create situational contexts in which freedom of learning is encouraged and rewarded. It also requires that learners develop their capacity to participate in social interactions concerning their learning, to negotiate for the right to self-determine its broad direction and ultimately to participate in the transformation of educational structures (Benson, 2001: 99).

It is necessary to respect the boundaries and constraints of the curriculum; however, there are still possibilities to give learners freedom, e.g. to choose appropriate vocabulary. This is what E.Jacob calls “reactive autonomy”. The kind which does not create its own directions but, once a direction has been initiated, enables learners to organize their resources autonomously in order to reach their goal. It is the kind of autonomy that causes learners to learn vocabulary without being pushed, to take the initiative to do past examination papers or to organize study groups to complete an assignment (Jacob, 1999: 99). For many authors the only acceptable outcome is what Jacob calls “proactive autonomy”. The autonomy which not only determines objectives, selects methods and evaluates what has been learned, but also sets directions (Jacob, 1999: 99). However, as Benson claims the reactive autonomy may serve as a step towards proactive autonomy or as a goal on its own. At the conditions of this action research, achieving the reactive autonomous behavior of the learners will be sought (Benson, 2001: 100).

In our further researches we will use Benson’s definition of learner’s autonomy. Learner autonomy is “capacity to take testing of one’s own learning” where testing involves the aforementioned areas. Also we have seen different views of the learner autonomy’s definition. Three levels of testing over learning were described and concrete inferences with relevance to practical part were made. In our further researches the importance of developing autonomous behavior will be discussed (Benson, 2001: 50).

Conclusions and prospects for further researches. Facilitative aspects of learner’s autonomy amaze us with their results: learners recognize and accept the need to organize the activity in an environment of interpersonal communication, facilitating personal development and providing constructive
personal changes; they develop skills of empathic comprehension; they are interested by participants in creating the conditions for the formation of meaningful learning and personal development as a whole as a result of restructuring of personal attitudes in the process of interpersonal interaction; they are aware of their self-sufficiency. All these numerous situations of interaction of people are carried out through four main methods of interaction: persuasion, imitation, suggestion and infection, which are facilitative in their context.

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СПИСОК ПОСИЛАНЬ


REFERENCES


Анотація. У статті показано, що автономність, як правило, не сприймається як метод навчання або поведінка, якою слід опанувати учневі. Автономність розуміється як особистісна якість, яка, як правило, актуалізується в різних сферах життя не лише в аспекті вивчення іноземної мови. За своєю природою автономність може бути метою впливу на підопічну особу, хоча це, є деякі основні ступені: автономність, що є нестабільними та мінливими; автономність, що є нестабільними та мінливими; автономність, що є нестабільними та мінливими; автономність, що є нестабільними та мінливими; автономність, що є нестабільними та мінливими; автономність, що є нестабільними та мінливими; автономність, що є нестабільними та мінливими; автономність, що є нестабільними та мінливими; автономність, що є нестабільними та мінливими; автономність, що є нестабільними та мінливими; автономність, що є нестабільними та мінливими; автономність, що є нестабільними та мінливими; автономність, що є нестабільними та мінливими; автономність, що є нестабільними та мінливими; автономність, що є нестабільними та мінливими; автономність, що є нестабільними та мінливими; автономність, що є нестабільними та мінливими; автономність, що є нестабільними та мінливими; автономність, що є нестабільними та мінливими; автономність, що є нестабільними та мінливими; автономність, що є нестабільними та мінливими; автономність, що є нестабільними та мінливими; автономність, що є нестабільними та мінливими; автономність, що є нестабільними та мінливими; автономність, що є нестабільними та мінливими; автономність, що є нестабільними та мінливими; автономність, що є нестабільними та мінливими; автономність, що є нестабільними та мінливими; автономність, що є нестабільними та мінливими; автономність, що є нестабільними та мінливими; автономність, що є нестабільними та мінливими; автономність, що є нестабільними та мінливими; автономність, що є нестабільними та мінливими; автономність, що є нестабільними та мінливими; автономність, що є нестабільними та мінливими; автономність, що є нестабільними та мінливими; автономність, що є нестабільними та мінливими; автономність, що є нестабільними та мінливими; автономність, що є нестабільними та мінливими; автономність, що