An Investigation into the Use of Learning Autonomy in the Libyan ELT Context and Its Impact on the Learners' Learning Behavior

A Case Study Conducted in a High School in Ajdabiya and the Department of English in the University of Ajdabiya

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تحقيق في مدى استخدام التعليم الذاتي في منهج اللغة الإنجليزية في ليبيا ومدى تأثيره على السلوك التعليمي للمتعلمين

(دراسة حالة اجريت في مدرسة ثانوية في اجدابيا وقسم اللغة الإنجليزية جامعة اجدابيا)

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الملخص : يهدف هذا البحث لدراسة مدى تبنّي مُعلّمي اللغة الإنجليزيّة في ليبيا ومُتعلّميها داخل الفصل الدراسي لفلسفة التعلّم الذاتي (learning autonomy). كما يهدف لدراسة مدى استخدام أساليب تعليم مبنية على هذه الفلسفة وأثر هذه الأساليب المُتَّبعة على سلوك مُتعلمِي اللُغَة الإنجليزيّة (Learning behavior) وجودة تعلُّمِهم لَهَا. حيث أُعتُمِدَ في هذا البحث أسلوب الملاحظة الشخصيّة في جمع البيانات لدراسة سلوك الطلاب التعلُّمي في عدد من فصول دراسية للغة الإنجليزية في مدارس للمرحلة الثانوية بمدينة اجدابيا في محاولة لسبر أغوار هذه العملية وذلك لتوفير فهم افضل لها. لطالما اعتمدت فلسفة نقل المعرفة الثابتَة (knowledge transmission model) في ليبيا لتعليم اللغة الإنجليزية و الذي يرى ان المعرفة شيء ثابت ينتقل من الكتب الدراسية للمعلم و الذي ينقله بدوره للطالب لترديده و بالتالي حفظه دون زيادة أو نقصان. يُفَسَّر ُتبّنِّي هذا النمط من التفكير بالتركيز المُفرط علي استخدام طريقة ترجمة القاعدة (GTM) و التي ترتكز بشكل أساس على ترجمة المفردات و القواعد و حفظها دون مناقشتها او التفكير بها او بإمكانية استخدامها لأغراض تواصلية. مما لا شك فيه ان هذه الفلسفة تتعارض بشكل تام مع فلسفة التعلم الذاتي (المرن و الحر) بالرغم من محاولات التغيير التي قامت بها الحكومة الليبية خلال العقود الماضية و بالرغم من قول المعلمين في كثير من الأحيان بانهم ينتهجون أساليب تعليمية أساسها التفكير الناقد و التفكير المبدع و تعلم اللغة الإنجليزية لأغراض تواصلية.

الكلمات الداله: التعليم الذاتي، اللغة الإنجليزية، السلوك التعليمي.

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Abstract: This research is an attempt to explore the extent to which the philosophy of autonomous learning is adapted in the Libyan English Language Teaching (ELT) context. This is done through the observation of a number of English language classrooms in Ajdabiya, Libya. English is mainly taught in Libyan schools using Grammar Translation Method (GTM) and other through knowledge transmission model-based methods. English language competence is viewed as a "ball" which can be brought from books to the teachers and then forwarded to students for memorization through repetition. This view of language learning allows no use or adaptation of autonomous learning or any other philosophy that suggests the use of critical thinking, creative thinking or learning English for communicative purposes.

Keywords: self-education, English language, educational behavior.

Introduction

This paper intends to investigate the application of autonomous learning activities in Libyan English high schools and the extent to which the philosophy of autonomous learning is adapted in this Libyan ELT context. It further attempts to explore the influence of these learning practices on the learners' learning behavior beyond their high school education (i.e., at their university level).

It is noteworthy here that this study does not aim to provide or suggest any solutions to the problem nor does it aim to test the applicability of them in the Libyan ELT context. It only aims to make the link and highlight the extent to which autonomous learning is adapted in Libyan EFL classrooms and the consequences of the relevant status on the learners' learning behavior.

Throughout the personal experience of the researchers in teaching English as a second language in Libyan schools and universities, it has been noticed that the students are usually very demanding and they normally expect the teachers to carry out most of the work in classrooms. If learning does not happen, they (and their parents) usually blame the teachers (for failure to deliver knowledge). This philosophy usually hinders any attempts to promote a culture of engagement of the learners to create a sense of responsibility among learners toward their own learning. The teaching practices derived from this philosophy have remarkably influenced the students' beliefs (heavily reliance on teachers) and made them hard to reverse. The university students graduate the universities with this philosophy in mind and then start teaching at schools. The students then join the university and expect the same type of education they had at schools. staff members at the university then find no other way to deal with (spoiled students) but through (delivering knowledge) and excessively maintaining knowledge transmission type of classrooms.

Research design and methodology

To set   the context of this research, three EFL classrooms were observed in the city of Ajdabiya to highlight the adaptation of autonomous learning philosophy and therefore the application of any relevant learning techniques by the teachers of English in this school. For some ethical reasons, the name of this school is not revealed as requested by its' stakeholders. When we approached them to obtain the necessary consent to approve our request to monitor the EFL classrooms in three sessions. Moreover, three EFL teachers were briefly interviewed in semi-structured interviews to share their insights and discuss this topic with us.

Observation and semi-structured interviews were used as methods of data collection. Therefore, we relied on our direct observation to collect the data. We used observation to obtain the data necessary to inform this study and to inspect the EFL situation in this school, on the one hand, and the interviews to triangulate (e.g., Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004; Thurmond, 2013) the raw data and make it thicker and richer and therefore increase its reliability, on the other.

The raw data collected through observation and the semi-structured interviews were themed, coded, and then classified with regard to their relevance to the main research problem and overarching goal.

The status of English education in Libya has been constantly changing over the past three decades. It has been banned at some point in the 1990s for at least six years. It has been then resumed with some restrictions on its scope (the major focus became on reading and grammar whereas spoken and listening skills were eliminated). The philosophy has been revised by the Libyan authorities again to include the four skills of English alike. The "authentic" study materials supplied by the Ministry of Education in Libya were deemed effective (e.g., Ibrahim, 2015; Aloreibi & Carey, 2017) yet challenging for the teachers. The teachers did not receive any professional development courses to cope with newly introduced study materials. This broke the entire plan of the Ministry and hindered the achievement of its intended long-term goals (Aloreibi & Carey, 2017).

English education currently starts from elementary school in Libya up to the university level. However, because English classrooms in secondary and high schools are similar and at many times and run by the same

teachers in each school (same teachers teach students of both levels in each school), we chose to select three classes from high school to use them as a "case" to inform this study.

This study, therefore, does not intend to generalize its findings nor does it intend to criticize the EFL situation either in the school or university education. It only intends to highlight the relationship and draw links between the two levels with regard to the use of autonomous learning. It further attempts to discuss the situation accordingly and examine the influence of the teaching practices (with reference to using autonomous learning activities) on the learner's learning behavior.

Learners can achieve this by following these three simple steps- first, by providing them an explicit instruction of how to be an independent learners. Secondly, they should be allowed to follow their ideas inside the class, third, learners should have opportunities to apply what they have to improve their learning skills outside the classroom. The only way to achieve this is by training. Training is key factor for students to enable them autonomous learners.

Throughout my career in teaching I have noticed that learner training can help learners to learn most effectively and learners will be able to take responsibility for learning. Nowadays, one of the biggest challenges that EFL learner encounter is how to be self-sufficient and autonomous learners who can manage their own learning inside and outside the classroom environment. autonomy is quite possible without training, and training certainly does not result in autonomy - they exist in a relationship which is unsteady, yet fruitful when dynamic McCarthy (1998). Autonomy is not an all or nothing concept, that all the learners might be trained to develop the degree of autonomy, but this can be achieved gradually (Nunan, 2000). Learner are not born with autonomy, it is the teachers' role is to instruct their learners to set goals, provide them with opportunities to practice they goals are accomplished.

Literature Review

In this section, the concept of autonomous learning, types, philosophy, and its applicability are covered. Moreover, the assessment of autonomous learning and its applicability in the Libyan ELT context are highlighted. This is used to set the context of this research and also to enrich the discussion of the results of this study after they are finally revealed at the end of the research.

What is Autonomy?

The word *autonomy* is defined in Collins COBUILD English language dictionary as "*the ability to make your own decisions about what to do rather than being influenced by someone else or told what to do*". Another definition by Holec (1981) he defined autonomy as "*… the ability to take charge of one's learning…*". We have noted that the majority of students are taught in ways that promote dependence but they failed to apply what they have learnt in the world beyond the classroom. McGary (1995) in his opinion about autonomous learner:
Students who are encouraged to take responsibility for their own work, by being given some control over what, how and when they learn, are more likely to be able to set realistic goals, plan programmes of work, develop strategies for coping with new and unforeseen situations, evaluate and assess their own work and, generally, to learn how to learn from their own successes and failures in ways which will help them to be more efficient learners in the future.

The success of learner autonomy requires collaboration with other members of the community. So collaboration and interaction of others are needed are very important in line with socio-cultural theories inspired by Vygotsky (1970) as well.
Recently, learner autonomy is considered a big change in the field of language education because it emphasizes the role of learner rather than the role of teacher. Thus, the notion of autonomous learning is historically and theoretically associates with communicative language teaching.

In fact, learner's autonomy is the responsibility of the teachers. Teachers can do this through training and practices until the learners gradually take responsibility of their own learning.

Learners Training

It is been said that there is no teaching without learning. That means effective teaching requires a great deal of training inside and outside the classroom. Hedge (2000) describes learner training as a *" set of procedures ... which encourages learners to become more involved, active, responsible in their own learning, and which helps them to strengthen their strategies for language learning."* Dickinson (1992: p. 1) cited in McCarthy (1998) states that :

Effective learners are capable of identifying the learning objective currently being pursued by the teacher. They know what to learn and how to formulate their own learning objectives [...] and they restructure the teachers' objectives to suit their own changing needs. They are able to select and implement appropriate learning strategies, monitor their use of strategies and change them if necessary, and monitor the effectiveness of their learning. This is what is meant by engaging actively in the learning process: these are the kind of decisions effective learners take about their own learning.

Brown (2007) suggests two forms of learner training: strategy- based instruction and autonomous self-help training. The aim of strategy-based instruction is to encourage the students to improve use their learning strategies in the classroom. While autonomous self-helping training which focuses on developing learner independent of the teacher who can manager their learning effectively. Hedge (2000: p.76) states eight attributes that characterize self-directed learner:

- Know their needs and work productively teachers to achieve their objectives.
- Learn both inside and outside the classroom.
- Can take classroom based material and can build on it.
- Know how to use resources independently.
- Learn with active thinking.
- Adjust their learning strategies when necessary to improve learning.
- Manage and divide the time in learning properly.
- Do not think that the teacher is a god can give them the ability to master the language.

EFL teachers who are wishing to develop autonomy among their learners should encourage them do all the above practices.

Learning Strategies and Autonomy

Classroom time is very limited for most Libyan EFL teachers, so autonomous learning is the solution. They need to motivate their learners to continue their study outside the classroom. Teachers need also to help leaners to develop strategies that will significantly enhance ability to learn inside and outside the classroom. Oxford (1990) classifies learning strategies into three categories: cognitive, metacognitive and socio-affective strategies.

Cognitive Strategies

According to Hedge (2000:77-78) cognitive strategies are seen as *"thought processes used directly in learning which enable learners to deal with the information in tasks and material by working on it in different ways."* Cognitive strategies usually involve hypothesis testing, such as searching for clues in surrounding material and one's own background knowledge, hypothesizing the meaning of the unknown item, determining if this meaning makes sense and, if not, repeating at least part of the process. (Carter & Nunan, 2001, p. 166). Examples of cognitive strategies: guessing meaning from context, writing notes, inferencing, memorization, repetition and reorganizing information.

Metacognitive Strategies

Metacognition involves the processes that the learners use to plan, monitor, evaluate their cognition and how to make it effective. Metacognition means above thinking, and it divides into two dimension: metacognitive

knowledge and metacognitive regulation. Flavell (1970) metacognitive knowledge involves the learner's knowledge of their cognitive abilities, tasks, and strategies. Metacognitive regulation includes monitoring their cognitive processes. There are many kinds of metacognitive strategies. Oxford (1990) cited in Hedge (2000) includes categories of centering learning, arranging and planning learning, and evaluating learning. Metacognition helps a lot in improving the learners' learning processes. It also can strengthen their academic level and how to use what they have learnt to learn what new tasks.

Social Strategies

Social strategies provide students with opportunities to practice the language. Oxford (1990) social strategies include: asking question for clarification or correction, cooperation with peers and proficient users of the new language , active participation in learning tasks and developing cultural understanding and become aware of others thoughts and feeling.

Affective Strategies

Affective strategies are the strategies used by learners to help them regulate their emotions, motivations and attitudes. For instance, lowering anxiety, encouraging yourself and taking one's emotional temperature and talk to yourself. Carter and Nunan (2001) suggest that "… Negative attitudes and beliefs can reduce learners' motivation and harm language learning, while positive attitudes and beliefs can do the reverse". Using these strategies can make the learning process more effective and successful because they allow the learners to control their feeling.

Memorization Strategies

Memorization strategies are techniques used to remember effectively, to retrieve and transfer information needed for future use (Hardan, 2013, p.172). For instance, creating mental linkages, applying images and sounds reviewing well and employing action (Oxford, 1990, p. 37). The students need these strategies especially in their initial stages of learning. They can help them to memorize new vocabulary and structures. For instance, creating mental picture, using flashcards or word rhymes.

Autonomous learning and constructivism

The constructivist theory is rooted mainly in the work of cognitive psychology by Piaget (1896-1980) and this theory has been widely applied in different fields such as: cognitive psychology, sociology , anthropology and education. Constructivism emphasizes learning knowledge is not a thing given by the teacher in the classroom, rather knowledge is constructed by learners through an active and mental process of development (Grag, 1997). The learners should build and create meaning of knowledge. The teachers' role is to provide students with experiences that would enable them hypothesize, predict, manipulate objects, pose questions, research, investigate imagine and invent (Wang, 2011). Constructivists emphasize on knowledge construction rather than transferring knowledge and recording information received by others. The learners can do this by using their previous knowledge to learn new information. Learning can be enhanced by social interaction and through authentic tasks (Bhattacharjec, 2015). Constructivist learning is inductive and the learner is not passive. They should make efforts to construct meaning from the information they receive. They also need opportunities to interact with others through small groups activities and discussions to internalize the knowledge. It is also necessary for them to use authentic tasks to help them learn what encountered in real life. As a result, constructivist learning encourages self-directed learning which is crucial element for autonomous learning.

Teachers roles in Autonomous learning

The term autonomy is termed as a situation in which the learner takes ultimate responsibility for what he / she learns, how to learn and when to learn. The teachers' main duty is to encourage learners to become autonomous. The teacher can play different roles : controller, prompter, participant, resource or tutor (Harmer, 2007). They are summarized as follow:

1. **Controller**: It means that the teacher should tell students what to do and what not to do, organize exercises and also control the students' behavior and language. He also make sense when giving explanation, organizing questions. answer work, make announcements. He is the leader in the classroom. Such leadership is beneficial especially in early stages of learning.
2. **Prompter**: Teacher acts like a motivator. He encourages students when they fail or lost in activities that he is giving them to help them think creatively.
3. **Participant**: The teacher should take part in the activity done in teaching and learning rather than standing back leaving the students get on with it and only interfere later to give feedback.
4. **Resource**: In this stage, the teacher is the provider of all information the students need. In other words, he / she should encourage students to use resource material to become more independent in their learning. The teacher should be available and helpful to their students when they need them or ask for help.
5. **Tutor**: It is difficult for teachers to be tutor especially in large group classes. Acting as a tutor means to work individually and closely with students when they prepare themselves for a debate, presentation, group discussions or larger projects. So, it is necessary for them to act as tutor from time to time to make students feel helped and supported.

The shift to a more student-centered approach requires a shift in the teacher's role. In autonomous learning, the teacher is no longer seen as dispenser of information, but rather as a facilitator , so that he should give the students more freedom and responsibility to take control of their learning.

Assessment for autonomous learning

Assessment plays an important role in language teaching and learning. Assessment refers to a general process of monitoring or keeping track of the learner's progress (Hedge, 2000). Assessment has two purposes; formative assessment and summative assessment. Formative assessment aims at monitoring the students learning to provide feedback. It also helps students to recognize their strengths and weaknesses. Whereas summative assessment is used to evaluate the students learning achievement at the end of the course. There are three types of assessment: self-assessment, peer-assessment and co-assessment.

Self-assessment: It is an alternative to traditional forms of assessment for the classroom teacher. The main goal of this type is to encourage students to develop the characteristics of good language learners (autonomous learners) which involves the ability to assess their own progress and to be self-critical (Ibid, 2000). In this process, the students monitor performance and made decisions on their reports, presentations, and assignments. However, self-assessment can be more valuable when the evidence to be assessed is intrinsically personal where only the students really know how well the evidence meet the purposes (Race, 2001). Self-assessment has advantages and disadvantages. The advantages are as follow: it encourages students to be responsible and contribute to the process of group work, it allows students to reflect on their peers. The disadvantages would be as follow: it has a risk of being perceived of presenting inflated grades and being unreliable (Ashraf & Mahdinezhad, 2015).

Peer-assessment: Peer-assessment is quietly different from self-assessment. Here the students' work assessed by other students. It encourages students earn from each other as they learn from their teachers. This process has advantages and disadvantages, its advantages include: it encourages students involvement and responsibility and to reflect on their role to group work and help students to develop judgment and feedback skills. The disadvantages include: the students will have the tendency to assess everyone the same and the students may feel reluctant to make judgment of their peers.

Co-assessment: it is an active cooperation between the student and the teacher in the assessment during the learning and teaching process. Assessment could be formative or summative such as lab reports, tests and essays. The students first assess themselves and the teacher provide his assessment. Later the marks are compared with the teacher and the teacher is the one who can make final decision (Falchikov, 1986), cited in Mesiridze and Tvaltchrelidze (2017). This kind of assessment is valuable in fostering autonomous learning

and encourage the student-centered approach. This assessment process is still not easy to use due to the teachers' and students' objection and mistrust are notable (Izci, 2016). The adoption of this approach is difficult to apply in the traditional classroom but it is possible.

The benefits of autonomous learning

The concept of autonomy has been central to language teaching and learning in the 1970s and 1980s and it was developed as a reaction to behaviorist assumption about second language acquisition. Language is pragmatic in nature, and used for the purpose of communication. It is used by individuals to express their need and thoughts. Autonomy is associated with communicative approach which emphasizes on individual needs and social norms (Nunan, 2000 cited in Ahmadzadeh & Zabardast 2014). Autonomy is absolutely essential for providing learners with opportunities to take control of their learning. The teacher's role is to encourage the students to recognize the value of autonomous learning. Meyer et al (2008) specifies five benefits from autonomous learning:

- It can improve the students' academic performance.
- Increase motivation and confidence.
- Greater students awareness of their limitation and ability to manage them.
- Enable teacher to provide different tasks for students.
- Fostering social inclusion by countering alienation.
  Autonomous with high achievement were felt easy to understand the material, express their opinions bravely and patient in doing their tasks (Zulaihah & Harida, 2017). There are three reasons for the significance of autonomy: fostering a survival capacity to cope with rapid social changes, develop learner individuality and enhance the diversity of cultural and educational background Umeda (2000) cited in Onozawa (2010).

Numerous studies conducted by Reeve and his colleagues (Reeve & Haulsic, 2009; Reeve & Jang, 2006; Reeve et al 1999; Reeve, 2006), have proved the effectiveness of autonomous learning. They found that it enables teachers to work with specific groups while other groups worked independently and students who use autonomous learning are more motivated and have higher self-esteem than other students. The students can also develop skills such as problem solving activities and use range of strategies in their learning (Meyer et al, 2008). Taking control of your own learning can help students to develop motivation that is important in learning (Benson, 2001). Autonomy can also encourage cooperative learning which is important factor in language learning because it generates interactive language, offer more security and more effective environment resulting in an increase in students motivation, serving more individualizing instruction and promote learner responsibility and autonomy (Brown, 2001).

To sum up, Autonomy is a good indicator for improving the students' academic growth, motivation, confidence and responsibility.

Autonomy in Libyan ELT contexts

The concept of autonomy was first introduced by Henri Holec (1981), which means how the learners take responsibility of their learning. autonomy has become popular in foreign language education. Few studies about language learning autonomy took place in Libyan contexts discussing various topics related to the effectiveness of autonomous learning. Libyan EFL teachers should teach their learners to be active by encouraging them to use different styles and strategies in their learning. They also might be taught how to take control of their learning and identify and select relevant resources that support and assess their progress.

Most EFL Libyan teacher are still using traditional teacher-centered approach which constrain learners from learning on their own. However, learner-centered approach has proved to be an effective method in the learning process. The Libyan educational system lacks English is in shortage of English teachers and they teach in large classes where the interaction between the teacher and students is sufficient. Thus, autonomous

learning is the solution and the only way to compensate the lack of opportunities to use the language (Sawan, 2016). Autonomy also helps Libyan students to learn vocabulary faster. A study conducted (Khalifa & Shabdin, 2016) has showed that students who are largely dependent on classroom teaching and teachers support will have problems in university.

Another study examined the relationship between autonomy and practice and found that the more motivated the participant are, the more autonomous they are (Sawan, 2018). A study conducted to investigate the teacher and learner perceptions and practices in relation to learner autonomy in a secondary school in Libya. The findings showed that teachers mostly help positive attitudes toward allowing learners opportunities to be active, responsible and learners themselves generally perceived themselves as adopting such roles (Almahjoub, 2014). Sawan (2016) suggests nine useful practices that teachers would do to promote autonomous learning:

- In writing assignment, the students should be given different topics and the students select the topic they interested in.
- In conversation classes, the students should also be given the freedom to discuss the topic they like.
- In reading comprehension classes, students should be allowed the passage they are interested in.
- Students should be given the freedom to reflect on what they have learnt.
- In revision classes, students should be given opportunities to decide the area which they feel need revising.
- Students should be encouraged to write magazines and posters and let them to decide the content of them.
- The teacher should discuss the components the course and give the students opportunities to decide the sequence to be taught.
- Teacher should help students to develop their metacognitive strategies for planning , organizing and evaluating their learning.
- Teachers should ask students how they did their task to elicit their strategy use and discuss and point out the effective ones according to the task.
  In fact, to be autonomous learner, students should set their goals, develop learning strategies to cope with learning problems, assess his learning and learn from success and failure to be successful learner in the future.

Criticism to autonomous learning

The notion of learner autonomy has been central in the last thirty years. Its importance has become desirable by many researchers. Despite of the many argument that supported autonomous learning, it has some criticisms. The objection comes from the field of education . Autonomy is seen not absolute and it has levels and the levels which are desirable by the students depends on three factors: their goals, philosophy of the institution and cultural context Nunan (1996) cited in Hibbs (2017). Hands (2006) criticism to autonomy, autonomy has two senses circumstantial autonomy (*freedom to determine on own action*) and dispositional autonomy (*inclination to determine one's own actions*) but he concluded that none will serve the aim of education. Autonomy Learner autonomy which suggests independence and self-sufficiency which may have negative effects on the learners and may experience an increased level of isolation and anxiety (Hibbs, 2017).

Another criticism is its cultural appropriateness. In western cultures which encourage autonomy, individualism and independence while in non-western cultures they value collectivism , harmony memorization and conceiving knowledge. (Gross & Gore, 2003; Iyenegar & Devoe, 2003: Markus & Kitayam, 1991) cited in (Nucamendi, 2014). This means that autonomy is difficult to be adopted in non-western cultures.

Data collection and analysis

For the data collection section, we proposed only one session to use as a model. The three sessions we observed were very similar. Although we did not plan to attend one particular class or choose one particular

teacher and the choices were random, we have taken almost the exact same notes on all of the three classes we observed. Therefore, and due to space restrictions and to avoid monotony, we will examine only one session here. The session is deemed a typical English class in many, if not all, of the secondary and high schools in Ajdabiya.

In one of the classes we observed, the teacher started by greeting the students in English and the students replied in English as well. The students ranged in age from 18-20 years old. Typically, students should finish their high school education at the age of 18 but there are many students who repeat one or two years prior to their university, education and therefore they fall behind their peers who travel smoothly without any repetition. The teacher then started giving instructions in Arabic on what would the unit include and its main focus (the grammatical structure). The teacher started reading the first reading passage and then asked if any of the students could read loudly to the class again. One student volunteered. She started reading with major mistakes in pronunciation and poor intonation. The teacher then started answering the questions, which followed the reading passage in the course book. The teacher then started explaining the rules explicitly on the board. She, then, took about 10 minutes in attending to the following exercises.

The teacher reads the "prompt" and then asks the students if they could respond to it. The students were very reluctant to speak (this will be discussed in the analysis section). They waited until the teacher provides "the correct" response and writes it on the board. Some of the students then write it down in their notebooks and many of them actually write it down in their course book. They use pens not pencils and write randomly around the prompt in a disorganized way.

The teacher then highlights the further exercises for homework and urges the students to do them at home. She explains to them in Arabic what to do and how to respond to the exercises.

The teacher says in one of the statements on doing homework at home: "you need to read the prompt carefully at home, you may use your dictionaries if you don't understand some of the words of this exercise. You may also get back to the exercises we did in class so you can remember what we did and therefore how you will do the assignment. As usual … this home work will be a possible part of either the mid-term exam, final exam or even both .. so please study it well" … End of translated text.

The teacher's instructions were made in Arabic and then translated into English by the researchers.

Themes and the main classroom observations

Theme 1

Despite the fact that the course book suggests the use of autonomous learning techniques (suggesting that the **Bureau of educational planning at the Ministry** of Higher Education in Libya **adapts this philosophy**), teachers do not seem to know much about autonomous learning. When we asked the participant teacher about the use of autonomous learning techniques in this school in general, teacher number (1) said "… I don't know what you mean. Do you mean we leave students to study on their own? How can that be teaching?... End of translated text. When we explained the philosophy of autonomous learning and how it is used worldwide, she said that (… I think it's not suitable for Libyan context and students. Our students are ready to go all that far yet. They require the easiest way **out [passing the course in the easiest way possible]** and for us [teachers] we also tend to choose the less demanding and the most **comfortable strategies possible** [rely on strict instruction and not including the students in any discussion], to be perfectly honest with you" End of translated text.

Theme 2

The classes are mostly teacher-centred and focused on instruction and lecturing. On this matter, teacher number (3) said "… of course we [teachers] should speak more and students speak less. The student should not be allowed to speak in class as the class can go very noisy and things get out of control. We supply knowledge that is what teacher are there for…" End of translated text. Teachers (1) and (2) provided similar responses on this point. For example, teacher number (2) said "… It's the teacher's sole role to transmit knowledge to students, that is the sign of the good teacher whereas a good student is the one who memorizes information and keeps them for as long time as possible …" End of translated text.

We can clearly understand from this discussion that knowledge transmission model is still dominant at least in these Libyan surveyed English classrooms. This suggests that no autonomous learning activities can take place in these classrooms as they contradict with the philosophy of the adapted knowledge transmission model.

Theme 3

The responsibility of learning in classrooms seems to be perceived as solely the teachers'. For example teacher number (3) said that "… a good teacher is the one who makes students understand the lesson well and conveys the information well ..." End of translated text.

All participant teachers say that some lessons need to be memorized and there are no other ways to learn them [except memorization]. Some other lessons need to understood and the teacher should spend every effort to simplify them to the students. Students should not be liberal to study on their own or asked to research and learn on their own. They should not be given the chance to comment or interact in classrooms. Things may go wrong at any time if this happens. Teacher number (3) for instance added "… You [teachers] should expect a lot of ill-behaviorism from the students if they are allowed to comment or talk while the lesson is in progress … if the student misses any part of the lesson they may ask the teacher to repeat and clarify it. Aside from that the student should not be allowed to say anything …" End of translated text.

From our observation and also the discussion with the three participant teachers, we can clearly note that the teachers and the students share a similar philosophy of learning in the surveyed classrooms. Helping the students to unlock their potentials and discover knowledge themselves or use it for real life situations is not on the "to-do lists" of the teachers. Teaching students how to learn does not seem to be among the goals that the teachers would like to achieve either.

Findings

Throughout our interviews with the participant teachers in the three surveyed English classrooms and observations both in the selected school of this study and at the department of English, the University of Ajdabiya, we can list the following findings:

- Teachers and students in the surveyed English classrooms do not adapt the philosophy of autonomous learning and therefore do not undertake any relevant learning activities.
- The lack of all forms of autonomous learning seems to influence the improvement of the students' learning behavior. The students have very little or no chance to develop any relevant skills so that they can learn on their own. They remain dependent on their teachers to acquire knowledge even beyond their high school education.
- Teachers do not promote a culture of self-learning in or outside of classrooms. There is almost no use of imagination and creative learning strategies and techniques or any other relevant practices that suggest the application of any forms of autonomous learning.
- Students who start their English education at the university come to the department with very similar learning behavior to that of the observed high school students.
- Students of English at the university level in Libya rely heavily on strict memorization and the mere repetition of study materials. The students are encouraged to memorize the study materials and promised that all questions of mid-term and final examinations are to be selected from these close-ended study materials. Therefore, students do not need to go any further or learn anything else on their own.

These findings should be taken with care as they are only the results of researching one school in Ajdabiya and the department of English in the university. Although our observations urge us to generalize them not only in Ajdabiya but also in schools in Libya as whole, we will only accept them as the results of a case study for the current time. We hope that other schools and universities will be further researched to make the generalizability of these findings more reasonable and therefore more likely to generalize.

Discussion and implications

It looks like the learning responsibilities are not very clear in the examined ELT context. Our observations of the ELT context in the department of English in our university and other universities from across the country also support this opinion. Most of the Libyan English classrooms are teacher-centered. It is the sole responsibility of the teachers to carry out the entire teaching process. It is also their responsibility to make learning happen. This indicates no use of any autonomous learning activities among the teachers.

Teachers believe that students only want close-ended study materials to memorize for the exams and pass with good marks. So, the teachers choose the easiest way out and give the students what they want.

Overall, considering the facts and reviews of autonomous learning in general in the literature review part of this research, the entire English education system of Libya needs to be revised before the students can undertake any learning activities on their own. Improving learning behavior, letting students develop this kind of skill so that learning can "take care of itself" (Harmer, 2007), promoting a culture of self-learning outside of classrooms are only examples of the factors that need to be addressed when the English education system in Libya is revised next. Furthermore, use of imagination and creative learning, learning through interaction and getting the "learners" more involved and bearing more responsibility toward their own learning need to be given more attention.

The English textbooks supplied by the Libyan Ministry of Education seem to suggest – at some parts of them – conducting autonomous learning activities. However, this does not seem to be sufficient, as teachers seem to have many misconceptions about autonomous learning and they have a common tendency to take "the easiest and less demanding way out". Continuous professional development courses may help in promoting this culture among the teachers of English in Libya but this requires the revision of the status of the entire English education system of the state. The above-mentioned components of the system cannot be treated separately. They should be treated and improved as a whole unit before any actual improvement can take place in the Libyan English education system. This reformation process may start with some further research to determine the problems precisely, suggest proper solutions for them and also how to put these solutions into practice.

Conclusion

Despite the common belief among the surveyed Libyan ELT teachers that Libyan students are not yet ready to undertake autonomous learning activities, the benefits of this education style should not be neglected or underestimated (as highlighted in the literature review part of this research). The university students in Libya in general rely heavily on blind memorization of facts and many teachers use it to assess and evaluate them too. These students then graduate the university to become elementary, secondary and high school teachers. Thus, they maintain the same style when they become teachers. In other words, the students in these schools join the university only acquainted with this style of instruction and therefore have nothing else to offer but to rely on instruction and urging students to memorize the study materials. The same process then continues until it becomes a chicken and egg situation at some point in the future. It becomes hard to decide. Does the problem start at the high school education or at the university level? Aside from the factors raised in this research, are there any other remaining ones contributing to the problem? Should learning behavior of the Libyan learners of English start from elementary school or probably even earlier?

This research has probably raised more questions than it has answered. However, the biggest question remains unanswered; when will the Libyan Ministry of Education attend to this issue and put some serious plans into practice to improve the English education outcomes in Libya in general and the learning behavior of the Libyan students in particular?.

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