

The Relationship Between Learner Autonomy and English Proficiency of Yemeni Postgraduate English Students: A Correlational Study in Hodeidah University

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Abstract

Knowing the level of students' learner autonomy and its impact on their language proficiency makes teachers aware of the significance of this term for better EFL learning. Also, this helps in fostering learner autonomy especially that one of advanced students. This study investigates postgraduate students' level of learner autonomy and its relationship with their English proficiency in a sample of 35 second-year postgraduate students undergoing two-year Master degree course in English, in the Department of English at the Faculty of Education affiliated to the University of Hodeidah, Yemen. The needed data are collected by a means of a learner autonomy questionnaire and a standard proficiency test. For data analysis, one-sample t-test and Pearson Correlation are used. The findings reveal that the learner autonomy and English proficiency of postgraduate English students, in Hodeidah University, are not significantly correlated and this implies that the high or low level of English proficiency of the students doesn't imply that their learner autonomy will be high or low correspondingly.

Keywords: Learner autonomy, language proficiency, postgraduate (PG), correlation and relationship.

1. Introduction

Second/Foreign language learning has become an essential component in people's lives, so educational research has emphasized the need for students to take responsibility for their own learning. Accordingly, many educators and experts agree that learner autonomy should be taken as a desirable educational aim for students to master the target language.

Littlewood (1991) claims that autonomy is an incontrovertible goal for students everywhere, since it is obvious that no students will have their teachers to accompany them throughout their whole life (Cotterall, 2000). Dafei (2007) does not perceive autonomy only as an ability to reach other skills; she denotes it as a goal of the learning and one of the most important issues that determines whether an individual reaches his or her potential or falls short of that potential.

There has seemingly been a shared agreement among scholars (Benson 2001; Derrick & Carr 2003; Scharle & Szabó 2000; Suharmanto 2003) that the capacity to do autonomous learning is a characteristic demanded of most students in today's globalized world, particularly of advanced students at university level that requires higher, more demanding skills and tasks so students should become autonomous to meet such demand (Bryde and Milburn 1990 and Stephenson and Laycock 1993).

Learner autonomy has been increasingly seen as important, so it is considered as an educational goal of today (Benson & Huang, 2008; Ponton & Hall, 2003), especially in higher education (Crome et al., 2011), including this in the context of education in Yemen.

Effective communication depends on a complex set of procedural skills that develop only through use; and if language learning depends crucially on language use, learners who enjoy a high degree of autonomy in their learning should find it easier to master the full range of discourse roles on which effective spontaneous communication depends (Little : 2002). In the field of second and foreign language teaching and learning, the importance of helping students to become more autonomous in their learning has become one of its more prominent themes (Benson 2001:1). Due to the significance of learner autonomy, it should be at least attempted to be installed into the learning process.

1.1 What is Learner Autonomy?

There is no single consensual definition of learner autonomy as this term seems quite simple but it is far from easy. Literature is constantly debating whether learner autonomy should be thought of as ability or behavior; whether it is characterized by learner responsibility or learner control; whether it is a psychological phenomenon with political implications or a political right with psychological implications or whether the development of learner autonomy depends on teacher autonomy as well (Little, 2002).

Learner autonomy has been defined in a number of ways in connection with language learning and it is confused with different terms in literature. Little (2002 : 3) states that learner autonomy is a problematic term because it is widely confused with self-instruction. It is also a slippery concept because it is notoriously difficult to define precisely. When it comes to its definitions, perhaps, the most often quoted definition is that of Holec (1981), the father of autonomous learning, who defines learner autonomy as 'the ability to take charge of one's own

learning'. This definition centers on two key concepts: ability and to take charge of one's own learning. Ability according to him is "a power or capacity to do something and not a type of conduct, behaviour". To take charge of one's own learning, on the other hand, is "to have, and to hold, the responsibility for all the decisions concerning all aspects of this learning", including;

- determining the objectives;
- defining the contents and progressions;
- selecting methods and techniques to be used ; monitoring the procedures of acquisition;
- evaluating what has been acquired, (as cited in Dafei 2007: 5-6).

For Lewis & Vialleton (2011: 206), these aspects of learning are referred to as a list of learning management tasks.

Dafei (2007: 6) thinks that this working definition captures the challenge of learner autonomy : a holistic view of the learner that requires us to engage with the cognitive, metacognitive, affective and social dimensions of language learning and to worry about how they interact with one another. Also, she stresses that particularly this definition implies that autonomy is not merely the act of learning by yourself but more precisely the ability to do so; it is therefore not as relevant to be independently learning at the given moment as to be capable of doing it eventually. Benson (2006) and Fenner (2000), on the other hand, concentrate above all on the claim that autonomy is more of an attitude or philosophy than a method.

Benson (2001: 49), however, argues that even though Holec's (1981) definition has sufficiently covered the main aspects of learning processes expected of an autonomous learner, the definition is problematic in the sense that the self-management tasks in the definition are mainly described in technical terms, lacking an important account on the nature of cognitive, psychological, mechanism that underlies effective self-management of learning. In response to Holec's definition (1981), Benson (2001) mentions that learner autonomy is a multi-dimensional construct (cf. Murase, 2007), and , furthermore, contends that a sufficient account of learner autonomy in language learning should include three levels of control over learning: control over learning management, control over cognitive processes, and control over learning content which are interrelated with each other. He prefers to use the term 'control' rather than 'charge' such as that used by Holec (1981), arguing that 'control' is more operational than 'charge'.

Under Benson's (2001) conception of learner autonomy, control over learning management is referred to as learners' observable behaviors to plan, organize, and evaluate their learning. While control over the cognitive processes is more in terms of psychology of learning, control over the learning content has both the situational aspect and social aspect of learning. Control over the cognitive processes is more related to attention, reflection and metacognitive knowledge rather than observable learning behaviors. The situational aspect of control over the learning content refers to the learners' freedom to determine their own goals and purposes of learning, while the social aspect may relate to learning situations and learners' ability to interact with others in the course of their learning.

To mention some other earlier definitions, we come to Brindley (1990) and Munby (1991), who simply defined learner autonomy as "the degree of responsibility students take for their own learning", while the Common European Framework (Council of Europe 2001, CEF) defined the concept of language learning autonomy as consisting of those items which need to be learned for both adequate communication and for the knowledge and skills which need to be developed by an effective autonomous learners.

Learner autonomy is affined to some confusing terms as Defai (2007: 5) illustrates that autonomy and autonomous learning are not synonyms of 'self-instruction', 'self-access', 'self-study', 'self-education', 'out-of-class learning' or 'distance learning'. These terms basically describe various ways and degrees of learning by yourself, whereas autonomy refers to abilities and attitudes (or whatever we think the capacity to control your own learning consists of). The point is, then, that learning by yourself is not the same thing as having the capacity to learn by yourself. Also, autonomous learners may well be better than others at learning by themselves (hence the connection), but they do not necessarily have to learn by themselves. The terms 'independent learning' and 'self-directed learning' also refer to ways of learning by yourself. But these terms are very often used as synonyms for autonomy.

In line with the historical development of learner autonomy in the foreign language teaching context, Benson & Huang (2008 : 424) note that there has been a shift of view on learner autonomy. They mention that in its early development, learner autonomy was more associated with both learning situations and learners' capacity to take charge of their learning, but firmly agree that recently the view of autonomy as a capacity to take charge of one's own learning tends to be much favored as apparent in the following quote;

In early work in the field of foreign language education, learner Autonomy referred both to situations in which learning proceeds independently of teachers or specially prepared teaching materials (Dickinson, 1987) and to learners' capacity to take charge of their own learning (Holec, 1981). There has been a tendency in more recent work, however, to reserve

the term 'learner autonomy' for the capacity to take charge of one's learning, while the terms 'self-directed' or 'independent' learning tend to be used for situations in which this capacity is put to use.

Since there is not a single specific consensual definition of learner autonomy and it is a controversial term, many other scholars, though concerned with autonomy, avoid stating a clear definition, choosing to address its associated characteristics instead. Among those belong, for example, Harmer (2007) and Wenden (1987) who prefer to define this term by describing the principles and importance of autonomy. Thus, the complexity of defining the term of learner autonomy sheds light on the complexity of achieving autonomy with the students because it is a long process which cannot be done immediately.

1.2 Language Proficiency

The present study investigates the relationship between learner autonomy and English proficiency, and language proficiency here is defined based on Hadley's (1993: 9) view on communicative competence. According to her, given the diverse goals of language programs/institutions, the ideally conceptualized communicative competence is better referred to in terms of language proficiency level. By this, language proficiency is expected to be different across language programs, depending on the goals of the programs.

Language proficiency, similarly to autonomy, is one of the terms which are frequently used but not easy to define or explain, although both are often referred to as the main goal of language learning (Farhady, 1980). Brière (1972) defines the language proficiency as "the degree of competence or the capability in a given language demonstrated by an individual at a given point in time independent of a specific textbook, chapter in the book, or pedagogical method". Though Brière (1972) chooses to define proficiency through the use of the term competence. The term language competence is therefore considered similar, though not identical, to language proficiency, as quoted in Hrochová (2012: 17).

The Interagency Language Roundtable ; ILR , (2011) avoids using the vague, and therefore problematic, terms such as "competence," "capability", "demonstrated", and "individual". It defines proficiency as a "person's ability to function in the target language regardless of the type of training he or she has had in that language", thus giving the definition the important connotation that a considerable part of being proficient means to be able to function in real-life language situations.

The Association for Academic Language and Learning ; AALL, (2007) , as well chooses to describe proficiency (in this case concretely English language proficiency, although the definition could be applied generally) in relation to its communicative importance as "the ability of students to use the English language to make and communicate meaning in spoken and written contexts" (2007 : 1). Regarding the content of proficiency, Harley (1990) illustrates that until recently, being proficient in a language means only a little more than grammar and lexis nowadays, however, as a result of the widely accepted communicative approach, the emphasis is being put primarily on the ability to communicate in the given language.

Harley (1990) claims that full English proficiency amounts essentially to fluency in English as both these terms refer to an ability to function adequately in face-to face situations and use English appropriately in a conversational context. Many scholars such as Harmer (2007) , Scrivener (2005), however, although admitting that fluency is with no doubt important for a language speaker, consider it only a part of language proficiency (supplemented usually by accuracy) serving to smoothly connect the language outcome together.

1.3 Learner Autonomy and Language Proficiency

Autonomous learning is more effective than non-autonomous learning. In other words, the development of autonomy implies better language learning. This is one of the hypotheses which almost all research in the field of autonomy is based on, and has implications for (Benson 2001). As Benson (2001:189) explains that many advocates for autonomy are concerned primarily with the ability to learn effectively in terms of personal goals. Autonomy may ultimately lead to greater proficiency in language use.

Many scholars, if only in theoretical level, ascribe to the autonomy the ability to foster proficiency, claiming that "an increasingly desired outcome of formal instruction is development of ability to continue improving language proficiency through self-instruction and experiential forms of learning" Dickinson and Wenden (1995) , as quoted in Hrochová (2012 : 22). Cotterall (1999) proves that the level of language skills needed for the desired language fluency could not be achieved by the sole means of in-class tutoring; but by the students' practice and opportunities to use the target language by themselves and ahead of the teacher in terms of their importance for successful language learning.

One of the reasons why the relationship between autonomy and language proficiency has become a critical issue in recent years is that researchers are increasingly beginning to understand that there is an intimate relationship between autonomy and effective learning. However, this relationship has largely been explored at the level of theory till today, and lacks substantial empirical support. Another reason is that world-wide concern with accountability in education is increasingly obliging teachers to demonstrate the effectiveness of their practices in

terms of proficiency gains. For both practical and theoretical reasons, therefore, there is a pressing need for empirical research on the relationship between the development of autonomy and the acquisition of language proficiency, Defai (2007 : 4).

2. Literature Review

Dafei (2007) asserts that only a few researchers have studied the relationship between learner autonomy and language proficiency and among them : Dafei (2007), Apple (2009), Lowe (2009), Hashemian & Soureshjani (2011) and Ng et al. (2011).

Dickinson (1987) as well observes that most of the needed research on the effectiveness of self-instruction in language learning has not been done and that “very few of the present or past methods and techniques for language learning are solidly based on research results. Either the research has not been done for them or the results are inconclusive”, Dickinson (1987), as quoted in Hrochová (2012 : 22). Also, Apple (2009) highlights that, in spite of how frequently is autonomy described as essential to increased English learning, there have been relatively few quantitative studies that support this claim.

In (2007), Defai conducted a study in China and found that the students’ English proficiency was significantly and positively related to their autonomy, and there were no significant differences among the students’ autonomy when their English proficiency was not significantly different. However, there were significant differences among the students’ autonomy when their English proficiency was significantly different.

Apple (2009) implemented a quantitative study in a sample of 204 students of a technical college in Japan, using two instruments. The first was the EFL autonomy questionnaire created by Shimo (2008), the second is the TOEICIP exam, that intended to measure the level of proficiency. The research confirmed the correlation between strongly developed learner autonomy and language proficiency.

Lowe in his study (2009) investigated the correlation between learner autonomy as measured by the Learner Autonomy Profile-Short Form (LAP-SF) constituting desire, resourcefulness, initiative, and persistence in learning and academic performance as measured by the GPA. The results of the study revealed that there was a positive, significant correlation between the LAP-SF total score and the total GPA, indicating a significant relationship between learner autonomy and academic performance.

Hashemian & Soureshjani (2011) investigated the interrelationship of autonomy, motivation, and academic performance, in English learning context in Iran. The bivariate correlation in the study also reported a significant correlation between learner autonomy and academic performance.

Another study aimed at investigating the extent to which scores on the LAP-SF predicted academic performance of the pre-diploma students of a university in Malaysia was carried out by Ng et al. (2011). The results showed a significant correlation between the two. Moreover, the Pearson product moment correlation analyses indicated that five components and one construct of the LAP-SF were revealed as statistically significant predictors of the semester GPA. Ten of the components scores, three constructs scores, and the LAP-SF total score were statistically significant predictors of the semester GPA in the English course, while three components scores and one construct score were seen to be statistically significant predictors of the semester GPA in the Mathematics course.

Hrochová (2012), in the diploma's thesis, investigated the relationship between the learners' autonomy and language proficiency by the means of comparison of students’ structure, duration and frequency of English related of out-of-class activities against their school grade and self-assessment of their own language proficiency. The data were collected by an 8 item questionnaire from 85 involved students and subsequently analyzed both separately and in relations to each other. The analysis of participants’ out-of-class activity preferences proved that the students prefer to train mainly receptive skills in their free time and are not very keen on working with textbook or any other printed material. Another conclusion was reached through the discovery of prevailing internal motivation the students have for performing the English related out-of-class activities and the amount of time they dedicate to it, averagely multiplying in this way the time they spent learning English at school.

In the Indonesian EFL setting, there have apparently been no deliberate attempts by Indonesian scholars in the early research to investigate the relationship between learner autonomy and English proficiency. If any, the research has mainly focused on the development of learner autonomy through the use of learning strategy training as in Susilowati's study (2010) , or on Indonesian students’ belief and their development of belief about EFL learning as in Wijirahayu's study (2000), which is very important for increasing students’ metacognitive skills - an important aspect of learner autonomy, or on the characteristics of autonomous learners (whether they exist or not) in the Indonesian EFL context as in Lamb's study (2004), as mentioned in Myartawan et al. (2013). However, Myartawan, et al. (2013) investigated the correlation between learner autonomy psychologically defined in the study as a composite of behavioral intentions to do autonomous learning and self-efficacy in relation to autonomous learning, and English proficiency. The sample comprised 120 first semester English-majored students of a state university in Bali, Indonesia. The data were collected from documents and by administering two questionnaires. Multiple linear regression analysis conducted reveal that learner autonomy and English proficiency

as defined in the study had a significant, strong, positive relationship.

Besides the previously mentioned researches, the present study is worth doing because, as Benson (2001) avers that the literature on learner autonomy, especially that on the relationship between learner autonomy and language proficiency, still lacks empirical support. Additionally, the results of this study can serve as an additional validation for practices aimed at fostering learner autonomy, especially in the Yemeni EFL setting in which research on such topic seems very rare or even not carried out, and contribute to the issue that learner autonomy could be potentially used as a better predictor of academic performance, (Lowe 2009, Ng et al. 2011).

3. Statement of the Problem

Formal instruction provides a chance for students to learn systematically and efficiently in FL classrooms. However, it is inadequate for students to meet the constant change of our society in the current era of information and technology. For example, formal instruction can neither provide students with various resources of life-long learning nor with adequate knowledge needed in the future. **Hence developing FL students' learner autonomy is undoubtedly makes up this inadequacy.**

More specifically, formal instruction doesn't satisfy university students' professional needs as they need to learn a FL for a better life. Due to this, it is frequently suggested that university students requires to become autonomous (Bryde and Milburn 1990; and Stephenson and Laycock 1993). However, the situation is different in the Yemeni context as the university students depends to a large extent on the formal instruction of their teachers and language instructors, in particular, who often use old teaching methodology in which the students rely heavily on them. For example, instructors prepare notes and hand-outs that are given ready for students, i.e. spoon-feeding technique.

It is strongly felt that university students are passive receivers of new information in the Yemeni universities. As individuals, they are unable to develop the necessary skills to learn, assess and control their own progress themselves and the levels of their English proficiency are not sufficient for university level.

Promoting learner autonomy in the higher education or even in the university level in Yemen is challenging for all language teachers/instructors because the students were educated in traditional classrooms where they were passive learners, learner autonomy was not encouraged and individual learning styles were not taken into consideration.

Learner autonomy, is one area of study that teachers/instructors should focus on in order to solve the problem of non-autonomous students at the university level and higher education. Therefore, developing students' autonomy becomes the fundamental purpose of FL learning and, specifically, it should be the goal of teaching university students in Yemen as Littlewood (1990) avers that autonomy is an incontrovertible goal for students everywhere. Thus, a study on the relationship between learner autonomy and English proficiency in the Yemeni context is becoming a pressing need.

4. Questions of this Study

This study investigates the relationship between the learner autonomy and English proficiency of 35 second-year students, undergoing two-year Master degree course in English by means of an autonomy questionnaire and a standard proficiency test. The collected data are analyzed using mean, standard deviation, T-test and Pearson coefficient to seek answers to the following specific questions :

- (1) What is the level of learner autonomy of postgraduate English students in the Department of English, Faculty of Education at Hodeidah University? In other words "are they autonomous students"?
- (2) What is the level of English proficiency of postgraduate English students? In other words "do they have high or low level of proficiency in English"?
- (3) How is the relationship between learner autonomy and English proficiency of those postgraduate English students?

5. Limitation of this Study

This study used limited subjects from a single faculty , i.e. postgraduate English students in the Faculty of Education at Hodeidah, and future research should include both the postgraduate and undergraduate students throughout Hodeidah University or any other university in the country. Further, the factor of gender remains to be explored, i.e. how to determine whether the learner autonomy of male and female students is related to English proficiency or not.

6. Research Methodology

The present study investigates the relationship between postgraduate students' learner autonomy and English proficiency, in a single group of 35 second-year students, undergoing two-year Master degree course. Therefore, based on Ary et al. (2010) and Latief (2010) , the present study employed *correlational research* in its design".

6.1 Participants

The study focuses on 35 second-year students of English, undergoing two-year Master degree course in the English Department, Faculty of Education at Hodeidah University. Those subjects have been selected because they are considered as the advanced students whose level of English marks the highest educational level in Hodeidah University.

6.2 Data Collection

To collect data, the study applies an autonomy questionnaire and a standard test. The standard test is used to identify the participants' level of English language proficiency and the questionnaire used to explore the level of the participants' learner autonomy.

6.3 Instruments

6.3.1 The questionnaire

In order to investigate the learner autonomy of the subjects, the researcher uses the questionnaire, designed by Zhang and Li (2004 : 23), as it has been proved to have high content validity and high reliability, and useful in previous researches. It is able to collect relatively vast amount of information in comparatively little time.

The questions asked in the questionnaire are revised and predicted on the basis of the learning strategies classified by Oxford (1990 : 17), Wenden (1998 : 34-52) and O'Malley and Chamot (1990). For the ultimate clarity and in order to avoid possible misapprehension, it is adapted and translated solely in Arabic language , the participants' first language, then tried and administered in person, by the researcher herself, during the class-time. It contains two sections; the first one is about the subjects' personal information (e.g. gender, years of studying English, years of experience in using English) and the other section covers 21 questions, based on the Likert-scale, and attempts to measure the subjects' level of learner autonomy. The subjects are required to finish the questions individually based on their own learning conditions for forty minutes.

6.3.2 The Standard Test.

To measure the subjects' level of English proficiency, a model of TOEFL (Testing of English as a Foreign Language) "ITP" (Institutional Testing Program) is adopted and used. ITP test uses academic content to evaluate the English-language proficiency (i.e. English language knowledge and skills) of non-native English speakers. Here, it is used as the evidence to show the subjects' proficiency in English after eleven years of learning it. The used test format matches the "TOEFL PBT" (paper-based tests), with the exception of the testing of speaking skill. Its score is 60. Pearson coefficients is applied in order to calculate the reliability of this test and it has indicated a high level of reliability (0.96) as it scores (0.001) significance.

6.4 Data Analysis

The following steps were followed for the analysis of the data:

- (1) To turn the subjects' choices in the questionnaires into the scores based on the Likert-scale. The scores from A to E are respectively 1,2,3,4 and 5.
- (2) To put the subjects' scores of TOEFL test , that are out of 60, and their scores of learner autonomy into the computer.
- (3) To analyze the data with SPSS 20.0. The analysis includes these aspects: the description of the mean and Standard Deviation of the data, the description of the correlation between English proficiency and learner autonomy using one sample T-test and Pearson coefficient.

7. Findings

- (1) What is the level of learner autonomy of postgraduate English students in the Department of English, Faculty of Education at Hodeidah University? In other words; "are they autonomous students"?

One sample t-test is used in order to find out whether the second-year Master degree students are autonomous or not and what is the level of their autonomy in learning English. The result of t-test is shown in table no. 1

Table no. (1) One-Sample Test

N	Test Value = 52				
	Mean	T	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference
35	76.94	17.398	34	.000	24.943

As it is clear in the table above that the mean value is (76.94), the T value is (17.39) with (34) difference and (P = .000) significance level that is very small (P < 0.05) in 2-tailed t-test procedure. These statistics indicate that the participants' level of learning autonomy is, *to some extent*, high with (76.94) mean, and they therefore can be considered as autonomous students.

- (2) What is the level of English proficiency of postgraduate English students? In other words "do they have high or low level of proficiency in English"?

Table no. (2) One-Sample Test

N	Test Value = 30				
	Mean	T	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference
35	39.40	7.943	34	.000	9.400

The table above displays that the mean value is (39.40), the T value is (7.943) with (34) difference and (P = .000) significance level that is less than .05 (P < 0.05) in 2-tailed t-test procedure. These statistics indicate that the participants' level of English proficiency is, *to some extent*, high with (39.40) mean. This enable us to say that postgraduate students do have proficiency in English language according to the analysis of their scores of the test though this level less what one expects from such advanced students.

(3) How is the relationship between learner autonomy and English proficiency of those postgraduate English students?

Table no. (3) the value of correlation coefficient

Pearson Correlation	.110
Sig. (2-tailed)	.528
N	35

Table 3 shows the value of the correlation coefficient (r = .110) and the significance value (P = .528) that exceeds .05 (P = .000) for the English proficiency and Learner autonomy used in the 2-tailed sample T-Test procedure. Here, statistics indicate that no correlation is found between the learner autonomy and the level of English proficiency of postgraduate English students, in the Faculty of Education at Hodeidah University. Accordingly, learner autonomy and the English proficiency of the participants do not correlate and there are no significant differences among the students' learner autonomy when their English proficiency is not significantly different. Thus, one can suggest that the presence of learner autonomy doesn't imply the simultaneous presence of language proficiency.

8. Discussion

The finding, that the learner autonomy and English proficiency of postgraduate English students are not significantly correlated, indicates that the high or low level of English proficiency of the students don't imply that their learner autonomy will be high or low correspondingly. This confirms the ideas of Ablard and Lipschultz (1998), Risenberg and Zimmerman (1992) that the correlation between language proficiency and learner autonomy was definitely not a simple causal relationship.

Also, this reminds us of Benson (2001) who has similarly claimed that the mere presence of learner autonomy (though, otherwise, he frequently advocates its grand importance) could not guarantee the development of as complex long-term achievement as language proficiency.

Furthermore, it agrees with the finding of Zhang and Li (2004) that there are no significant differences among the students' learner autonomy when their English proficiency is not significantly different. But there are significant differences among the students' learner autonomy when their English proficiency is significantly different.

9. Conclusion

In this study, the theoretical part describes the concepts of learner autonomy and language proficiency. The main point is to ascertain the relation of those two terms to each other. It serves as the basis for the practical investigation of the relationship between language proficiency and learner autonomy. The needed data are collected by means of a questionnaire for the learner autonomy and a standard test (viz, TOEFL) for the language proficiency, from 35 involved postgraduate English students in Hodeidah University and subsequently both instruments are separately analyzed and in relations to each other. The analysis of the collected data indicates that the students' English proficiency is not positively related to their learner autonomy, and there are no significant differences among the students' learner autonomy when their English proficiency is not significantly different. However, these findings contrast with what one has expected, one can't deny that teachers should foster the students' learner autonomy in the classroom, especially that of advanced students (i.e. postgraduate) and in the relevant training programs in foreign language teaching and learning. This might help in improving the students' English proficiency as the more autonomous a learner becomes, the more likely s/he achieves high language proficiency.

10. Implications

The current study suggest some implications both for teaching and learning English as a foreign language, especially for advanced or university students in Yemen.

First of all, both students and teachers need to understand the significance and necessity of learner autonomy, so that students can mainly depend on themselves in learning English and subsequently teachers should enhance the students' learner autonomy while teaching English in order to facilitate the language learning process.

Learning from teachers/instructors as the only source of information is not enough to install autonomous

learning. Instead, language teachers should change their teaching and move towards learner-centered classrooms. The ultimate goal of any language teacher should be to prepare students for life-long learning and this can be done only if they become autonomous learners.

Specifically, teachers at university-level should try hard to make students more autonomous by using different techniques in the classes and by doing different activities. Doing this help teachers to figure out the level of autonomy of university students (e.g. students of Hodeidah University).

Teachers should explicitly teach learning strategies that help students attain the goals of improving their mastery of the target language. Also, learning strategies help students become better language learners. When students begin to understand their own learning processes and can exert some control over these processes, they tend to take more responsibility for their own learning. For example, students can be asked to make their learning schedule and design lessons and materials to present in the class. When students faced with long-term assignments, they benefit from planning their time and organizing the assignment into small tasks. This makes students more responsible for their learning. (See Chamot A. U., et al. *Developing Autonomy in Language Learners : Learning Strategies Instruction in Higher Education (A Resource Guide)*. National Capital Language Resource Center (NCLRC).

Teachers should take into account that learner autonomy, affected by learners' motivation, that is one of the most important factors deciding learners' English proficiency. So they should motivate students to learn English, for English as a language needs students' own efforts and good exploitation of time and energy to learn it well. This study, therefore, suggests that a training program on autonomous learning should be included in the language curriculum, particularly that one meant for university students who need higher, more demanding skills and tasks such as reading a novel, analyzing a poem or story, listening to lectures, or writing a research paper.

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