READINESS FOR AUTONOMOUS LEARNING IN ESL CLASSROOM: THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract

Readiness for autonomous learning is an emerging trend in ESL classrooms and has engaged teachers, learners, and researchers to explore it and avail themselves of their self-directed language learning journey. Readiness, in terms of learning, is categorized in multiple ways like behavioral, linguistic, motor, physical, socio-emotional, and cognitive skills indicating preparedness to receive formal educational instruction. As a result of exhaustive review of relevant research in this particular field, the current study targets to identify, analyze and evaluate the underpinning theories that shed light on readiness for autonomous learning, integrating technology, collaborative tools, digital portfolios, constructive feedback, and personalized instructions from teachers to support and encourage an ESL learner. The comprehensive study also reveals the issues and barriers along with the coping strategy ensuring readiness for an inclusive autonomous learning environment that guarantees language development and lifelong learning skills.

Keywords: Readiness, autonomous learning, learner-centered, ESL, Strategies, barriers,

Introduction

ESL stands for "English as a Second Language," which is related to the process of teaching and learning English language to individuals who don't use English as their native language. Although its precise origin and coinage are unknown and not credited to any individual, rather it evolved as a descriptor for programs and courses designed to teach English language to non-native speakers (Ellis, 2015). The development of the term ESL is a part of the broader scenario of English language teaching (ELT), that likely emerged gradually as the need for such programs and instruction became more apparent. ESL education is crucial for non-native users of the English language who wish to acquire proficiency for various purposes, such as communication, education, employment, or social integration. According to Bukhari and Cheng (2017), there are several factors that directly or indirectly affect the willingness to communicate in the English language; such as perceived communication competence, motivation, personality, attitude, content, and context.

ESL education is a structured curriculum for individuals that helps learners to develop proficiency in English grammar, pronunciation, vocabulary, and language skills like listening, speaking, reading, writing, and critical thinking. The instructional methods in ESL education include one-on-one tutoring, classroom instructions, online courses, and language immersion programs conducted by trained professionals who specialize in teaching English to non-native speakers (McKay, 2012). It evaluates the proficiency and progress of the learners following the language acquisition stages, for example, beginner, intermediate, and advanced level through standardized tests like TOEFL (Test of English as a Foreign Language), IELTS (International English Language Testing System), TOEIC (Test of English for International Communication), CELPIP (Canadian English Language Proficiency Index Program), Cambridge English Qualification of KET (Key English Test), and many more.

The English language is well thought out as a global lingua franca. It is generally used for international communication, international education, economic opportunities, and the global tech industry, which widens the scope of trade, diplomacy, international relations, and the global job market. It claims its importance as a passport to success in securing social

status, social mobility, and employment. (Yasmin & Sohail, 2017). In a globalized world of today, the dynamics of any nation's workforce are relative to their proficiency in the usage of the English language. ESL increases personal and social mobility. It increases the scope of employment, social inclusion, and resource/service access. ESL education provides advantages, but it must be adequate, accessible, and high-quality, complementing native languages and cultures, and addressing socioeconomic inequities in access. However, in today's connected world, ESL education is often seen as a practical necessity to succeed worldwide and accomplish numerous goals.
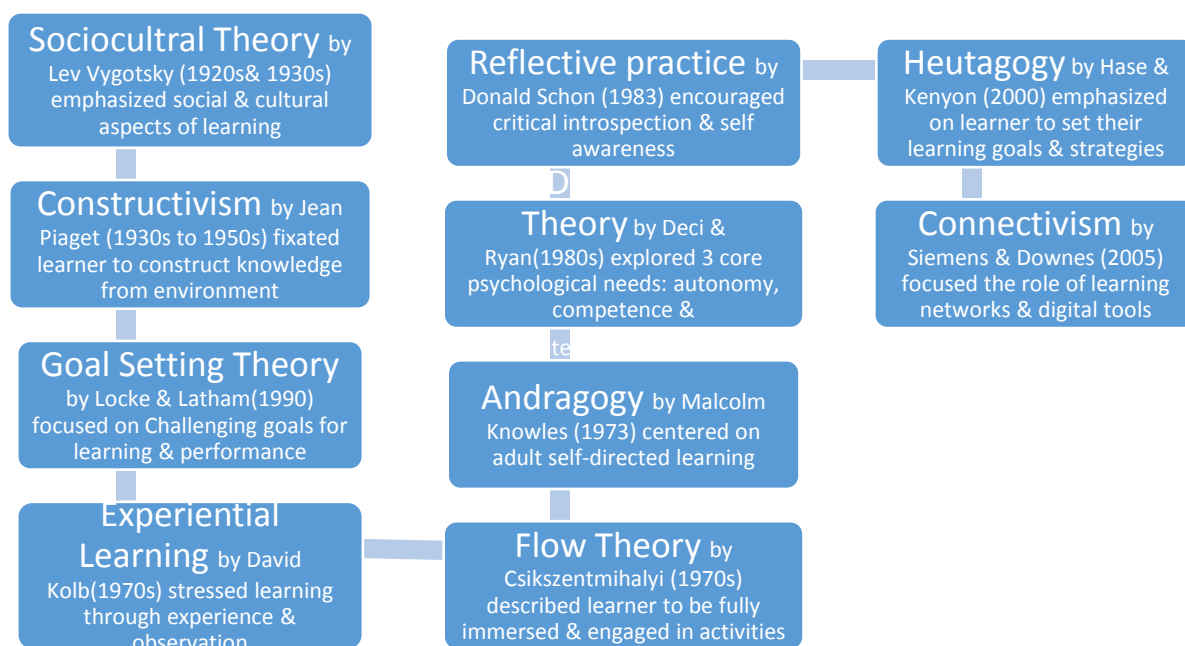
Purpose and significance of the paper

The learner's readiness is regarded to be more critical than previously thought. Cultivating the mental preparedness of the learners helps them take the lead in the language learning process and ultimately brings more significant dividends in language acquisition (Lin & Reinders, 2018). The primary aim is to identify and analyze the underpinning theories that shed light on the phenomenon of readiness for autonomous learning of English as a Second Language (ESL) in classrooms. Learner's autonomy generates a feedback loop, allowing them to track their progress and speed. Learners may establish goals and construct a plan to achieve them. Autonomy depends on preparedness. Autonomy is somehow called applied preparedness. One cannot have autonomy until and unless they, themselves, are willing to pursue their ambitions. Thus, the learning autonomy begins with preparedness. Due to the complex link between preparedness, autonomy, and language acquisition beliefs, this study aims to comprehend them. Traditional ESL reduces learners to passive actors, limiting their beliefs. This paper aims to develop a relationship among readiness, autonomous learning, and ESL classrooms to study the effectiveness of this triumvirate in language acquisition and how they interact and influence each other.

Theoretical Framework

Theoretical Approaches for Autonomous Learning

The approach of self-directed learning is known as autonomous learning that allows an individual to initiate learning planning, controls the activities, and evaluates the assessment. It is a critical skill for lifelong learning and personal development. Several theoretical approaches and models have been proposed to understand, support, and promote autonomous learning (Tsai, 2019). The following are the vital theoretical approaches for autonomous learning:

Sociocultral Theory by Lev Vygotsky (1920s& 1930s) emphasized social & cultural aspects of learning

Reflective practice by Donald Schon (1983) encouraged critical introspection & self awareness

Heutagogy by Hase & Kenyon (2000) emphasized on learner to set their learning goals & strategies

Constructivism by Jean Piaget (1930s to 1950s) fixated learner to construct knowledge from environment

Theory by Deci & Ryan(1980s) explored 3 core psychological needs: autonomy, competence &

Connectivism by Siemens & Downes (2005) focused the role of learning networks & digital tools

Goal Setting Theory by Locke & Latham(1990) focused on Challenging goals for learning & performance

Andragogy by Malcolm Knowles (1973) centered on adult self-directed learning

Experiential Learning by David Kolb(1970s) stressed learning through experience & observation

Flow Theory by Csikszentmihalyi (1970s) described learner to be fully immersed & engaged in activities

In light of those mentioned above theories, we can say that these theoretical approaches offer multiple perspectives that fit in perfectly with the dynamic and ever-evolving process of Autonomous Learning; for example, constructivism aids in critical thinking and problem-solving approach, SDT supports creating desired and required environment, GST aims for the final product, Sociocultural theory encourages peer collaboration and mentorship, etc. Learning autonomy is a crucial concept that is widely recognized nowadays by many educational institutes worldwide (Crabbe, 1993). Learning autonomy is recognized as an important 'pedagogical goal' (Wenden, 1987) and realizing the individual potential (Sinclair 1996).

Dickinson (1987) also maintains this perspective by adding that learning and personal autonomy should be introduced as an educational goal facilitated by self-instruction. Promoting autonomous learning is considered an innovative program (Benson & Lor, 1998). In light of these advocacies, autonomous learning stands out as a prerequisite for effective language learning. Benson (2001) highlighted that autonomous learners are better language learners who develop more responsibility and critical thinking. Teachers should create the opportunities that enable learners to choose and plan their learning. Littlewood (1996) opined that autonomous learners are able and willing to make choices independently. 'Ability' along with 'willingness' are defined as the critical notions of the learners' autonomy. Learners will be much more confident performing independently while gaining knowledge and skills. Individual involvement in decision-making enhances motivation to learn, and thus it increases learning effectiveness (Dickinson, 1995). However, Kenny (1993) argues that autonomy in education and language learning reflects empowerment to the learners, which allows them to have opportunities to generate knowledge. As a result, learners actively take part in educational instructions rather than passively.

Autonomous Learning in ESL Classrooms

Autonomous learning in English as a Second Language (ESL) classrooms signifies a shift in pedagogical and the evolving needs of English language learners (ozer & Yukselir, 2021). Autonomous learning, often called self-directed or independent learning, encourages learners to take greater responsibility for language acquisition. Many measures have been taken by the governing bodies, educational boards, and administrative heads of institutions to promote a smooth learning system for English, a second language in Pakistan (Yasmin,
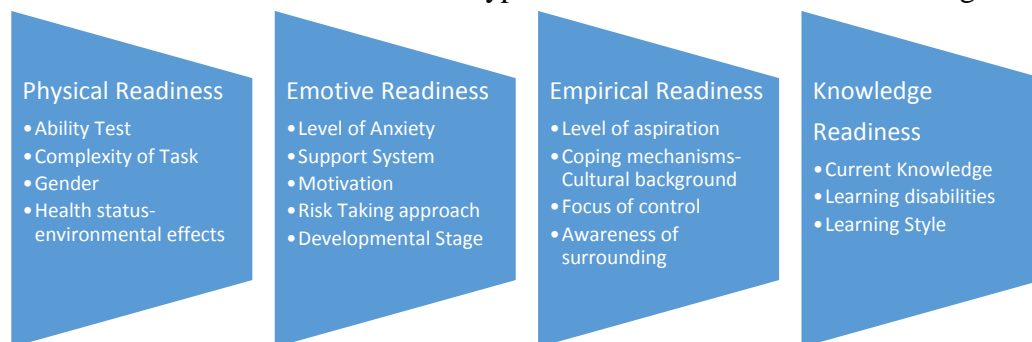
2018). Autonomous learning encourages students to take full responsibility for learning, thus, transforming the role of a teacher into a facilitator or a coach who offers direction, support, and feedback. This technique relies heavily on technology, which allows students to practice language at their speed using internet resources, language learning apps, and communication tools. ESL teachers promote autonomy by providing a choice of tools and activities that allow students to choose topics that interest them, thereby increasing motivation and engagement.

Autonomous learners establish their language learning objectives, track their progress, and acquire metacognitive skills, instilling a sense of responsibility for their learning. Autonomous learning, which frequently involves exposure to real-world content like movies, podcasts, novels, and news articles, fosters critical thinking, problem-solving, and self-discipline in addition to language acquisition. More formative evaluations and chances for self-evaluation must be incorporated into traditional assessment techniques to facilitate this change and reflect how students engage with the course materials. Autonomous learning in ESL classrooms is responding to changing education and student demands. It understands that self-directed learning promotes motivation and achievement and prepares learners for a future where it is essential. It is crucial to combine autonomy with direction since not all learners are ready for self-directed learning. Therefore, autonomous learning is rooted in the present reality of the learner and is futuristic in its outlook (Ahmed, 2014).

Readiness for Autonomous learning

Readiness is a state of being fully prepared or a willingness to do something. In terms of learning, readiness is the behavioral, linguistic, motor, physical, socio-emotional, and cognitive skills that indicate preparedness to receive formal educational instruction. Learning readiness refers to how well-equipped and well-prepared a pupil is to learn, considering circumstantial and environmental factors.

Let us take a look at the four types of Readiness in terms of learning:

Physical Readiness	Emotive Readiness	Empirical Readiness	Knowledge Readiness
• Ability Test • Complexity of Task • Gender • Health status-environmental effects	• Level of Anxiety • Support System • Motivation • Risk Taking approach • Developmental Stage	• Level of aspiration • Coping mechanisms-Cultural background • Focus of control • Awareness of surrounding	• Current Knowledge • Learning disabilities • Learning Style

Applied linguists investigate readiness in various methods, considering elements including learner variations, exposure to the language, motivation, cognitive development, and past language learning experiences. The following are some essential components of applied linguistics readiness:

- o **Cognitive Readiness** describes a student's level of mental preparedness for learning. It is possible that different language activities call for distinct sets of cognitive abilities and that different phases of cognitive development best prepare learners for various tasks.
- o **Emotional Readiness** refers to a learner's emotional inclination toward language learning. Motivation, self-assurance, apprehension, and disposition towards the target language might influence learners' preparedness to participate in language acquisition activities.
- o **Social Readiness** considers the impact of social elements on acquiring linguistic skills. Social preparedness includes the learner's engagement with

peers, exposure to the language in genuine social settings, and the cultural significance of language resources.

- o **Contextual Readiness** stands for the consideration of the learning environment and the available resources. A learner's readiness can be influenced by linguistic input, instructional materials, and conducive learning conditions.
- o **Linguistic Readiness** means language aptitudes or the elements a learner possesses to improve. This involves factors such as keenness to acquire new words, expertise in grammatical structures, pronunciation proficiency, and other linguistic faculties.

Conceptualization of Readiness in ESL Classroom

In the field of applied linguistics, the term "readiness" stands for a learner's ability to choose a specific set of linguistic competencies. It has generated much heat as a topic of debate in the field of SLA and language teaching. Readiness is estimated by the convergence of a few elements like cognitive, emotional, environmental, and social that aid willingness and capability of a learner to acquire a new language or foster aptitudes for the language. The notion of readiness in an ESL classroom necessitates the recognition and presence of various parameters which can determine a learner's readiness for English language proficiency at different levels (Lin & Reinders, 2018).

One of the most important factors in assessing a person's readiness for autonomous learning is intrinsic motivation, which is fueled by curiosity and personal interest. Mostly, learners are to initiate and persevere through problems if they are driven by a sincere desire to investigate. Another important component is self-efficacy and confidence; people who have faith in their own skills are more likely to participate actively in autonomous learning. A more individualized, successful learning experience can be promoted by evaluating and taking into account each learner's distinct style and preferences, which also affect their preparation. It is easier for goal-oriented people to stay on course since they are more likely to approach autonomous learning with a clear direction and purpose. Another crucial ability is time management; people who can successfully mix their study time with other obligations are typically more

A well-designed physical learning environment, whether in a classroom, library, or home study place, is critical in preparing students for autonomy by encouraging focus and motivation. Having access to current technology, which includes computers, iPads, and the internet, can help promote self-directed learning by letting the students explore available resources like online courses, educational apps, and digital resources independently. Immersion in the target language can also improve autonomous language acquisition because real-life exposure to the spoken and written language encourages individual exploration. Furthermore, culturally relevant learning materials increase student engagement and motivation. Effective assessment encourages skills like critical thinking, creativity, and problem solving that help to promote autonomy by allowing students to take charge of their own learning. Teacher support, including supervision, feedback, and mentorship, is critical in moving students toward self-directed learning.

Role of learners in developing readiness

To develop readiness for autonomous learning, learners' role is crucial. The cultivation of a keen sense of self-awareness, and recognition of their learning methods, preferences, and talents serve as the foundation for learners' successful independent learning, adapting their methods in accordance with their requirements (Bozkurt & Arslan, 2018). Furthermore, learners are themselves responsible for defining their explicit goals and objectives, and with

the help of this, they can pave a path for self-directed learning, choosing appropriate resources, tasks, and deadlines. It not only fosters a sense of purpose but also boosts motivation.

Furthermore, they are responsible for the developmental stages of metacognitive abilities; such as critical thinking, problem-solving, etc. These abilities enable learners to effectively negotiate the intricacies of self-directed learning, enabling them to assess and modify their tactics as necessary (Khanh, 2024). To adopt a proactive mentality, learners should actively pursue a wide range of learning opportunities, encompassing conventional academic materials and real-world experiences. It is crucial to seek and manage knowledge actively, remain updated on current advances, and engage in continual self-assessment to establish preparation for autonomous learning. In essence, learners are the active participants in their educational journey, along with being the passive users of knowledge. Their dedication to self-directed discovery and personal development is crucial in equipping them for a future characterized by continuous learning.

Strategies for Promotion of Readiness in ESL Classrooms
Teacher-centered Approaches to Promote Readiness

In an ESL classroom, the instructor is usually concerned with fostering a supportive environment that enables the students to acquire the language, improve communication skills, and gain cultural awareness. Here, the teacher-centered approaches can promote autonomous learning by empowering the learners to take charge of learning while still receiving support and guidance from the instructor (Serin, 2018). The provision of a controlled yet adaptable environment can also assist learners in developing autonomy. Having a well-organized curriculum and well-defined learning goals, learners are enabled to grasp their roles progressively and to take Charge of their language development. Ultimately, learners seek opportunities to apply their interests to real-life language issues through assignment choices, guided exploration activities, task-based or project-based learning, and scaffolding that promote critical thinking and facilitate learners in transition from depending on the teachers to independently facing real-life language challenges with their unique interests. Furthermore, Avelino and Ismail (2021) assert that a technology-savvy instructor can integrate digital tools to facilitate self-directed learning, while collaborative activities promote peer feedback and community engagement.

Ultimately, by permitting learners to establish their personal objectives and adopting a limited role of facilitator, instructors enable the learners to ask questions, look for clarification, and explore resources, thus cultivating the confidence necessary for lifelong learning. Autonomous learning is crucial for individuals learning English as a second language (ESL), and teachers can enhance this skill development in their learners by integrating multiple teacher-centered teaching strategies (Saeed, 2021). This method encourages learners to participate in the guided language learning process, ultimately resulting in language users who are more self-sufficient and proficient in their use of the language.

Learner-centered approaches to develop readiness

In an ESL classroom, the learner's level of active involvement and initiative is one of the most critical factors in establishing preparation for autonomous learning, encouraging self-directed language acquisition, and fostering a lifetime commitment to language mastery. Developing the abilities and mentalities required for independent learning is the goal of these techniques (Ismail, Yunus, & Zahidi, 2020). Preparing learners for autonomous learning necessitates the practice of several learner-centered strategies. Performing a needs analysis ensures that various language learning goals are considered while facilitating students to customize personalized, short-term, and long-term objectives to cultivate a sense of

ownership and motivation. Incorporation of self-assessment and portfolio assessments permits learners to keep a track of their progress, and using reflection journals or blogs encourages metacognition by assisting them in articulating challenges and achievements.

By placing learners at the center of topic and project selection, and incorporating project-based and inquiry-based learning, students can independently practice their language skills in day-to-day contexts while benefiting from peer collaboration. The integration of technology, such as apps for language learning, social media platforms, and online exchange opportunities, further supports these efforts. The role of a teacher, as a facilitator, providing continuous feedback, helps create a conducive environment for active, self-aware learning. In ESL classrooms, instructors may develop an environment by employing these learner-centered techniques to promote the evolution of learners' linguistic abilities and also to nurture learners' sense of autonomy and self-efficacy (Doyle, 2023). Thus, these strategies equip learner to keep pursuing their language studies outside of the classroom setting.

Challenges and Considerations to Promote Readiness

When it comes to the promotion of readiness for autonomous learning, the ESL classroom presents its own unique set of challenges and considerations. The readiness of ESL learners for self-directed learning and practicing is mainly influenced by cultural and contextual factors. In an ESL classroom, students' attitudes toward education vary from cherishing independence and self-discipline to favoring collaborative, teacher-centered methodologies. Cultural values have an impact on learners' readiness; individualistic contexts promote self-directed learning, while collectivist situations prioritize social cohesiveness and orthodoxy. Moreover, conventional regard for authority, family expectations, and availability of socioeconomic and technical resources altogether influence learners' capability for independent study. Cultural perceptions regarding failure are also of great importance: a growth mindset nurtures resilience and initiative, while a stigma linked to failure may deter learners from taking risks and cause learned helplessness (Ziegler, Bedenlier, Gläser-Zikuda, Kopp, & Händel, 2021).

Taking into account the learners' diverse backgrounds and fundamentals is just as central. Adapting activities and resources to meet individuals' needs, for example, integration of culturally relevant materials and contributing audiovisual aids, guarantees that students bond with content that mirrors their identities and learning preferences. Customized learning plans and numerous assessment methods allow students to establish personal goals, keep track of their progress, and take charge of their educational journey. The support for time management and controlled scaffolding boosts confidence and autonomy. Instructors can develop a collaborative environment by implementing group projects, guided conversations, and peer feedback, as well as taking on a guided teaching role, to build a comprehensive environment that encourages transparency and recurrent progress. Instructors can efficiently address individual needs through regular check-ins and constant professional development. Collectively, these strategies can foster an empowering educational environment in which ESL students are motivated, confident, and well-equipped to pursue self-directed learning and meet their language acquisition goals.

Implications

Planning learner-centered activities and materials

The basic goal of planning learner-centered activities is to cultivate engaging, adaptable practices that accommodate students' distinct interests, needs, and learning styles. Learners exhibit more autonomy and engagement in their education when they can choose topics, tasks, and delivery methods of their own choice. Using authentic content—such as multimedia, real-world literature, and cultural materials—helps connect language learning to personal experiences, whereas interactive approaches like group projects, role-playing, and

simulations promote peer collaboration and practical language use. Integrating critical thinking, problem-solving, and inquiry-based tasks promotes curiosity and independent investigation. Additionally, scaffolding and structured guidance progressively boost learners' confidence, while reflective exercises and self-assessments allow them to track their progress and set goals. Technology and tailored training further boost participation and collaboration, ensuring that feedback is prompt and constructive, eventually fostering a culture.

Integration of technology and digital tools

Technology and digital tools have become part and parcel of our daily lives. We are exposed to these tools and gadgets in routine, and the integration of technology and digital tools is inevitable. According to Çaliskan (2017), e-readiness of teachers can make learning easier than before, for example, language learning applications and games, such as Quizlet and Memrise, use adaptive strategies to improve vocabulary and grammar. Outside of the classroom, digital collaboration platforms like Microsoft Teams and Google Workspace promote peer connection and teamwork. Virtual communities and online forums encourage dialogue and cross-cultural interaction among students, which further enhances participation. Artificial intelligence (AI)-powered adaptive learning tools customize learning by assessing student progress and offering specialized help, whereas cutting-edge technologies like augmented reality (AR) and virtual reality (VR) yield immersive language practices. Digital portfolios, digital platforms, and reflective notebooks can help students to keep track of their progress and assess their educational pathway. Whereas, instructors' feedback through digital communication offers constant support and incentive, and also online coaching and language exchange programs link students with native speakers for real-world language use. Alakrasha and Razakb (2020) opine that educators can use these technologies to support ESL students in developing independence, exploring diverse resources, and gaining lifetime learning skills.

Conclusion

The results of research studies illustrate that readiness for autonomous learning in the context of an ESL classroom is essential to ensure that learners of the English language with the mindset, resources, and skills required to thrive in an ever-changing world. It not only increases language proficiency and linguistic abilities but also fosters a lifelong love for learning and strengthens the capability to familiarize oneself with different educational and professional environments. By and large, a great number of scholars and researchers have so far advocated the idea of readiness for autonomous learning in connection with diverse levels of learners from various backgrounds. By offering educational pathways that are both adaptable and inclusive, teachers can create an environment that empowers ESL learners to take charge of their educational journey, enrich their self-confidence, and acquire skills vital for lifelong autonomous learning and success.

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