THE FACTORS THAT AFFECT LEARNER AUTONOMY IN LEARNING ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE (EFL) AT TERTIARY LEVEL IN BANGLADESH

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ABSTRACT
Learner autonomy is a worldwide known concept in the field of L2 learning. A lot of research has been carried out on the issue. Using quantitative method, the present research investigates the factors that affect learner autonomy in EFL learning at tertiary level education in Bangladesh. Likert scale questionnaire is used to collect data from fifty students of five private universities in Chittagong, Bangladesh. The findings reveal factors including different learning strategies and learning styles that affect learner autonomy. These also include the learners’ attitude, self esteem and self confidence. The practice of using technology and library resources also seem to play a positive role in influencing learner autonomy. This paper will provide teachers and students new insights into learner autonomy against the backdrop of tertiary level education in Bangladesh.

KeyWords: Learner autonomy, Tertiary level, Education, EFL (English as a Foreign Language), Learning Strategies.

1: Introduction

1.1. Background to the Study

This research aims at investigating the factors that affect the practice of learner autonomy in learning English as a foreign language (EFL) at tertiary level in Bangladesh. English today has become very important as an international language in most countries of the world. Its use as a lingua franca in connecting people of different nations worldwide is indispensable. In many countries it is even used as a second language. That is why; students all over the world are learning English as a compulsory subject. Even in Bangladesh irrespective of public or private universities, students of various disciplines are taught English as a major course. They are offered two or three foundation courses so that they can develop their English language skills which will in turn aid them in pursuing their own disciplines which are taught in English.
In most cases English is taught by teachers at tertiary level in Bangladesh using traditional method of delivering classroom lectures. They teach grammar using the Grammar Translation Method (GTM) in teacher-oriented classrooms. In Bangladesh, teaching is generally viewed as “teacher-centered” (Choudhury, cited in Bashir, 2014, p.171). Teachers use the deductive method of teaching and they provide lectures using Bengali and English blended together. They are the only active speakers, whereas, the learners in EFL classrooms are passive listeners. Most of the time teachers supply students with stereotyped notes and questions. Learners become heavily dependent on teachers and so they fail to develop their skills in English. They are not able to utilize their creative faculty in developing the receptive and productive skills to express themselves in English. Most of the time, they suffer from anxiety, shyness and fear of making errors. They even hesitate to express any sort of problems they face. They are reluctant to approach their teachers in case they may be rejected. As a result, learners feel demotivated. Learners realize that they will not be benefitted if they remain passive. They wish to learn English without depending on teachers. They feel more at ease if they can share their problems in learning English with their peers. They prefer to be active and to take charge of their own study and so learner autonomy should be promoted in EFL classrooms at tertiary levels.

Learner autonomy in EFL education received a great interest from researchers all around the world with a great deal of the research originating in Europe and Asia (Nguyen, 2014) Nguyen also states that as researchers have approached learner autonomy from different perspectives, there exists various definitions on learner autonomy.

1.1.1. Learner Autonomy

Holec (1981, cited in Bashir, 2014, p.172) defines the term autonomy as ‘the ability to take charge of one’s own learning.’ Again the development of learner autonomy in foreign language classrooms can contribute to achieving optimal success in language learning (Little, 2004a cited in Bashir, 2014, p.171). Learner autonomy ensures a ‘learner’s freedom as an individual one’ and it goes ‘against old, traditional and teacher-centred practice of language teaching’ (Jamila, 2013, p.31). Autonomous learning encourages EFL learners to take
responsibility for their own learning and this also helps them build up their cognition and self confidence. Learners can monitor their own language learning and every learner gives himself immense importance.

1.1.2. English as a Foreign Language (EFL)
Using English as a foreign language means ‘the role of English in countries where it is taught as a subject in schools but not as medium of instruction in education nor as a language of communication (eg in government, business or industry) within the country’ (Richards, Platt and Weber, 1987, p.93). This research is about learning EFL at tertiary level in Bangladesh.

1.2 Statement of Problem
Learner autonomy has been commonly practised around the world from the end of the twentieth century and it has been successfully used in ‘teaching second language worldwide’ (Jamila, 2013, p.29). In Bangladesh the teacher-led approach is still a tradition, that is, the main task of a teacher is to transmit knowledge to her students rather than encouraging the students to become autonomous in their learning. It is demotivating for learners to find that even after studying English for fifteen years (from play group level up to class 12), they fail to study on their own without depending on teachers’ support.

1.3 Research Context
The above section provides a brief view of the issues related to learner autonomy and the need for undertaking a research on the factors that affect learner autonomy in learning EFL in Bangladesh. This study describes the rationale for conducting such research and how to promote learner autonomy in learning EFL in Bangladeshi tertiary level education.

1.4 Education Structure of Bangladesh
According to Bangladesh Bureau of Education Information and Statistics (BANBEIS)\(^1\), the present education system of Bangladesh consists of three major stages namely, primary, secondary and tertiary education. Primary level institutions impart primary education, junior secondary/secondary and higher secondary level institutions impart secondary education. Degree pass, degree honours, masters and other higher level institutions impart tertiary education.

The education system is categorized into two streams: primary education (grade I – V) and post primary education. The post primary education is further classified into four types in terms of curriculum: general education, madrasah education, technical-vocational educational and professional education. General education consists of primary level, secondary level and tertiary level. Tertiary level is comprised of 2 – 6 years of schooling at colleges. Universities offer graduate and post-graduate degree level education. The University Grants Commission (UGC)\(^2\) is the apex body of all the affiliate public, private and international universities of Bangladesh. It provides fund for ‘Government funded universities’ of Bangladesh. It maintains the autonomous nature of universities. It also ensures the availability of higher education in Bangladesh. The Government does not deal with universities directly but has to deal

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\(^1\) http://www.banbeis.gov.bd/es_bd.htm
with UGC which in turn deals with various universities. UGC offers scholarships to outstanding students, funds researches and organizes seminars.

The UGC of Bangladesh was established under the President order (P.O.) No. 10 of 1973 which was deemed to have come into force with effect from 16 December, 1972.

**Research Aim and Significance**

The aim of this research is to investigate the factors that affect learner autonomy in learning English as a foreign language (EFL) at tertiary level in Bangladesh. The findings of this research will hopefully encourage EFL learners to be able to practice learner autonomy so as to boost up their confidence and learning aptitude. It will also allow teachers to develop autonomy among the learners so as to facilitate their English language learning.

**2: Literature Review**

This chapter reviews literature on definition and topics relating to learner autonomy. Section 2.1 gives definition of learner autonomy from different sources. Section 2.2 discusses the different learning theories such as positivism, constructivism and the critical theory, which foster learner autonomy within EFL classrooms. Section 2.3 describes the issues involved in developing learner theory followed by the description of the learning strategies that learners practise for self-directed learning in section 2.4. This includes the cognitive and the metacognitive strategies. The social-psychological factors i.e. attitude and motivation are discussed elaborately in section 2.5. Finally, section 2.6 suggests some ways in which learner autonomy may be developed within EFL classroom.

**2.1 Learner Autonomy (LA)**

As indicated in (chapter 1) a number of definitions of learner autonomy generally exist in education, particularly in EFL. Following the definition given by Holec in 1981, a number of other definitions for learner autonomy were used. Wenden (1999, cited in Nguyen, 2014,) indicated the importance of metacognitive awareness when she claimed that, the learner autonomy refers to how students reflect on their learning and how they are able to realize when they have effective learning opportunities. The field of language teaching comprises of many more terms synonymous to autonomy such as ‘language awareness’ (Lier, 1996, cited in Jamila, p.31), ‘self-direction’ (Candy, 1991, cited in Jamila, p.31) which serve the purpose closely. If we review some of these
definitions we may be able to understand closely what learner autonomy means and aims at. Learners in EFL classrooms are dependent on teachers of learning and this is demotivating in their English learning atmosphere. However, do these students really prefer depending on their teachers for their learning? Harmer (2007, p.394) notes that a language teacher may be good but students will face difficulty ‘unless they aim to learn outside as well as during class time.’ He also adds that ‘students need to be motivated by teachers to develop their own learning strategies,’ Thus, they become autonomous learners, that is, they are ‘the doers rather than the recipients of learning action.’ Edge and Wharton opine that even though ‘classrooms provide a relatively safe environment for language discourse; the major goal for learners is to be able to transfer what they have learnt to the world outside’ (Tomlinson, p.296).

According to Littlewood (1996, p.97), ‘autonomy is the learner’s ability and willingness to make choices independently.’ In order to have successful learning, learners should be reflectively engaged in planning, monitoring and evaluating their learning in the class. The skills and knowledge the learners acquire in the classroom can be utilised in the world outside (Little, 2000, cited in Bashir, 2014,p.172). So, learner autonomy enables an EFL learner to learn in a self-directed way. This learning is not imposed for the learners but rather achieved. They are not controlled by anyone else rather they feel enthusiastic about taking responsibility of their own learning. In this way they are able to find out and solve their own problems in EFL learning by exploring their hidden potentials and interests. The teacher plays the role of facilitator and creates a congenial and productive environment for the learners. Gould (2013) states that learner autonomy enables learners not only to take control and responsibility of their own learning but also makes students capable of self – direction and are able to develop an independent, pro-active approach to their studies. She believes that such students are self – reliant have the potential to learn better than passive learners.

From the discussion so far, researchers assign the following attributes to autonomous learners (Jamila, 2013):

- Learners set their objectives and are aware of their goals.
- They utilize and experience freedom in selecting materials according to their objectives.
Researchers understand that in order to become autonomous, a learner has to work to achieve autonomy and that autonomy comes when one is educationally experienced (Candy, 1991, cited in Thanasoulas, 2000).

2.2 Learning Theories and Learner Autonomy

In this section, three important approaches which influence knowledge and learning and how they are linked to learner autonomy will be discussed.

2.2.1 Positivism

According to Benson & Voller (cited in Thanasoulas, 2000), Teachers believe that knowledge reflects objective reality. So, learning is the transmission of knowledge from one individual to another. Positivism favours teacher-centred traditional classrooms where teachers are considered as suppliers of knowledge and students are passive learners. This view is contrary to learner autonomy. So, positivism inhibits learners in EFL classes and demotivates them from setting objectives to achieve their goals. This view of positivism is opposed to the development of learner autonomy in which learners are free to set their objectives in a teacher–student friendly environment.

2.2.2 Constructivism

Constructivism learning theory is based on the principle that students build knowledge based upon existing ideas and it avoids direct instruction. As Candy (1991,p.254) observes, ‘...one of the central tenets of constructivism is that individuals try to give meaning to, or construe, the perplexing maelstrom of events and ideas in which they find themselves caught up.’ It runs counter to positivism in which students receive knowledge passively. The activities are interactive and student-centred rather than lesson – centred. The teacher is seen as a
guide to learning and helps each learner to create knowledge based on information that they get from their world around them. So, this approach makes EFL learners capable of self-direction and enables them to play their role as active learners of knowledge.

2.2.3 Critical Theory
Critical theory agrees with constructivism in the sense that knowledge is not discovered or learned but it is constructed (Thanasoulas, 2000). According to critical theory, knowledge consists in completing ideological versions of that reality expressing the interests of different social groups (Benson & Voller, 1997, cited in Thanasoulas, 2000). They also state that critical theory is all about power and politics. It deals with power relations and power dominance. It focuses on certain powerful groups in society which bring about social change. This helps learners to realize the social context in which they learn independently, banish all sorts of false beliefs, and can be thought of as authors of their own worlds.

2.3 Issues Involved in Developing Learner Autonomy
So far in this study, main features of learner autonomy have been discussed. It is comprehended that autonomy is not a product but as process. It is achieved by fulfilling certain conditions such as learning strategies including the cognitive and the metacognitive, motivation, attitudes, beliefs and modes, awareness about the language and the self and meta - language, that is, a language analyzing another language. One vital condition for attaining learner autonomy is the role of a teacher. Learner autonomy cannot be achieved without teacher support. Teacher helps gear up the EFL learners’ enthusiasm into practicing learner autonomy. The learner and teacher interaction is essential for the learner autonomy to be implemented. However, autonomy being a new concept to some teachers, they fail to understand it. They are ill – prepared and reluctant to allow students to take over their own learning. Only after understanding the concept of learner autonomy, teachers can motivate students to develop learning strategies through learner training in the classroom by raising learner awareness. They should realize it is worth assimilating learner autonomy into their pedagogy.
2.4 Learning Strategies
Learner autonomy involves students using a number of learning strategies which they are capable of applying flexibly in different contexts. O’Malley and Chamot (1990, cited in Cook, 2008) carried out an extensive research according to which learning strategies is based on cognitive psychology. Learning strategies are steps taken by the learner to make language learning more successful, self-directed and enjoyable (Oxford, 1990 cited in Cook, 2008). Cook (2008) notes that it is a choice a learner makes in SLA and which affects his L2 learning. Based on this concept of learner autonomy this study discusses two main learning strategies.

2.4.1 Cognitive Strategies
The term ‘cognitive strategies’ refers to the use of mind (cognition) in language learning, that is, it involves ‘using all your mental processes’ (Cook, 2008, p.116). O’Malley and Chamot (1990, cited in Cook, 2008) say that cognitive strategies involve conscious ways of tackling learning, such as note-taking, resourcing (using dictionaries and other resources) and elaboration (relating new information to old). They further add that strategies help enhance the learners learning by operating and directly manipulating incoming information. The cognitive strategies increase the efficiency with which a learner learns to do a task. According to Cook (1993, cited in Thanasoulas, 2000), learners may use the following cognitive strategies:

- Use of repetition for imitation of speech.
- Practice resourcing such as dictionaries for information.
- Using one’s mother tongue for translating so as to be able to understand and produce L2.
- Note – taking of lectures delivered in L2.
- Deduction, that is to know how to apply L2 rules.
- Using contextualization to insert a word or a phrase in a meaningful sequence.
- Transfer, that is to remember facts and sequences in L2 by utilizing information acquired in L1.
- Use of inference to match an unfamiliar word with a familiar word.
2.4.2 Metacognitive Strategies

It is an indirect strategy which involves ‘organizing and evaluating one’s knowledge for e.g. by preparing in advance what is going to come up in the next class’ (Cook, 2008, p.116). Metacognitive strategies concern with planning, thinking monitoring one’s learning. It also involves evaluating how well one has done (O’Malley and Chamot, 1990, cited in Cook, 2008). The strategy of planning includes the setting of goals and selecting appropriate cognitive strategy to achieve those goals (Wenden, 1998, cited in Thanasoulas, 2000)). They can assess their strengths and weaknesses.

2.5 Social and Psychological Factors: Self-esteem, Motivation and Learner Attitudes

If language is communication, then successful EFL learning depends on some social and psychological factors of learning and teaching so as to establish meaningful EFL in the classroom. Students’ learning activities depends on their learner awareness as learners, their learning context, the language to be learnt, their learning styles and strategies and their desire to learn. Shumann (1978, cited in Thanasoulas, 2000) and Larsen – Freeman and Long (1991, cited in Thanasoulas) view that social and psychological factors describe in a better way how students react to the learning processes. These factors include learners’ self – esteem, attitudes and motivation.

Learners have a clear idea about the purpose of learning the language, the areas of their problems and improvement in that language. Coppersmith (1967, pp.4-5), states that self - esteem is ‘a personal judgement of worthiness that is expressed in attitudes that the individual holds towards himself’. According to him learners having good feelings about themselves are sure to succeed.

Attitude is defined by Wenden (1998, p.52) as ‘learned motivations, valued beliefs, evaluations, what one believes is acceptable, or responses oriented towards approaching or avoiding’. Two types of attitudes are vital according to Wenden; learners’ attitudes and beliefs about themselves in learning process and their ability to learn. Students’ beliefs about themselves have an impact on their performance in the EFL classrooms. For instance if the students are convinced that they do not possess enough aptitude for language learning they may not make any effort to learn the language. In other words, beliefs can become unfortunate
in fostering learner autonomy. Teachers have a role in assessing whether student’s beliefs might have a negative impact on learning. So, learners need to possess positive attitudes to get themselves motivated.

Motivation according to Dornyei (1998, cited in Thanasoulas, 2000) is the main stimulating factor in L2 learning. Motivation is crucial as it enhances the desire of a learner in EFL classroom. Motivation makes a learner feel optimistic about her success in EFL learning.

2.6 Ways of Developing Learner Autonomy
There are different ways of developing learner autonomy. Cotterall, (2000, cited in Harmer, p.395) suggests that in order to promote learner autonomy and create learner awareness, learners should be assigned language courses which ‘reflect the learners goals in its language, task and strategies.’ The course tasks should be authentic related to the real world and ‘promote reflection on learning.’ Some common ways of developing learner autonomy are:

2.6.1 Journals
According to Harmer (2007, p.400) journal writing provides students ‘ good writing practice and helps to improve the students’ general writing skills and enable them to express feelings more freely.’

2.6.2 Self –reports
Wenden (1998) states that self- report writing help learners to introspect on their learning. She also adds that self – reports provide information on the strategies learners use at the time of report. Wenden categorizes self- report into two types: semi – structured interviews and structured questionnaires both of which extract information about the learners’ feelings, skills and the problems she or he faces. By writing self –reports learners can become aware of their learning strategies and also can evaluate their goals and techniques for learning.

2.6.3 Note – taking and Diaries
EFL learners at tertiary level study courses in which lectures are delivered in English
and for these they need to take notes. Harmer (2007, p.399) observes ‘the purpose of this activity is to get students to select a strategy so that they can take responsibility for their own note – taking method’. Some learners take copious notes, while others note down a few points. Diaries on the other hand, help students to plan, monitor and evaluate their learning, identifying any problems they run into and suggesting solutions (Thanasoulas, 2000). Again, though the notion of learner independence does not follow tradition where the teacher is director of learning, yet the teacher does not completely relinquish authority. Teachers can help students to develop learning strategies through learner training in many ways. Learners should also take initiatives in learning because people who take the initiative learn more than those who wait passively for teachers to teach them (Knowles, cited in Bashir, 2014, p.176.). So, teacher-student relationship is vital.

From the above literature review, it can be observed that learner autonomy is practiced worldwide. At present, it enjoys high demand and is considered to be immensely fruitful. Hence, it is important to investigate the scope of implementing Learner autonomy in Bangladesh. This study investigates the factors that affect the learner autonomy in EFL classrooms at tertiary level in Bangladesh and also hopefully it will give rise to further scopes for other researchers to work with learner autonomy.

3: Research Methodology

Earlier, chapter two outlined the existing research on factors affecting learner autonomy in learning English as a foreign language and it mainly focused on the different theories and other issues including the strategies which develop learner autonomy among EFL learners. Chapter three provides the research questions in section 3.1 and description of the sampling and population in section 3.2. The subsequent sections describe the method in which this research was conducted in section 3.3 the instruments that were employed in section 3.4 including the discussion of the data collection in section 3.5 and the analysis methods that were used in section 3.6. Finally the potential problems and limitations are described in section 3.7.
The primary focus of this study is on learners and the factors that affect learner autonomy in EFL learning in Bangladesh and the research question for this study are:

1. How autonomous are the tertiary level EFL learners in Bangladesh?
2. What are the factors that affect learner autonomy at tertiary level in Bangladesh?

3.2 Sampling and population
The sample population in this study comprises of fifty undergraduate students from first to eighth semesters of different faculties studying in five universities of Bangladesh. These students belong to various disciplines including English, Electrical Engineering, Bachelor of Business Administration (BBA), Pharmacy, BSc in Textiles and Economics and Banking and have taken English as the prerequisite course to fulfil the requirement for graduation. Five universities that are selected for the study are University of Science and Technology Chittagong (USTC), Southern University Bangladesh (SUB), International Islamic University Chittagong (IIUC), Port City International University (PCIU) and University of Information Technology and Science (UITS).

The participants for this study are chosen using random sampling, that is, samples are selected randomly. Selection is based on chance and it is unbiased. Conclusions can be made pertaining to the population from the results obtained from the sample, (Dornyei, 2007). 50 participants are chosen through random sampling for quantitative data.

3.3. Adopted Methodology with Rationale
Since the present study aims to respond to the research questions of a quantitative nature, quantitative method is used to explore the issue.

Quantitative research is a formal objective and systematic process where numerical data is used to collect information about the world. Quantitative research is a very useful research methodology because it is less time consuming and less costly because the data can be analyzed using statistical computer software. This inquiry is rigorous, focused and tightly controlled, involving precise measurement and producing reliable and replicable data that is generalizable to other contexts (Dornyei, 2007). By employing quantitative method in this research, it is
expected that the result that would emerge would be acceptable to a large audience.

3.4 Instruments

The instrument, a written questionnaire is used to collect a quantitative data. A questionnaire is a research instrument consisting of a series of questions and other prompts for the purpose of gathering information from respondents. Although they are often designed for statistical analysis of the responses this is not always the case.

The following table is an overview of the relation between research questions and items in the questionnaire:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research questions</th>
<th>Related items in the questionnaire</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 1) How autonomous are the tertiary level EFL learners in Bangladesh? | a) I cannot learn English with/without my teacher/myself.  
b) I should learn English within my institution/at home/outside the class.  
c) I can evaluate my learning/plan my learning.  
d) Self-study gives me confidence/interest.  
e) I do not understand when I read alone.  
f) I can organise my learning materials with/out teachers help.  
g) I can plan my learning schedule. |
| 2) What are the factors that affecting learner autonomy at tertiary level in Bangladesh? | a) I use the resources available at the university library.  
b) I use computers/audio-visual equipment for learning English activities.  
c) I do not know how to use technology/online learning activities for learning English. |

Likert Scale questionnaire is used to collect quantitative data from the participants. The questionnaire has two sections: one background information of the participants and the second part consists of twenty items designed to elicit responses on a five-point Likert Scale ranging from agree to strongly disagree to get information from students. The format of the questionnaire is shown in the appendix.

3.5 Data Collection Procedure

The questionnaires are distributed among 50 undergraduate students selected from the
five universities namely, University of Science and Technology Chittagong (USTC), Southern University Bangladesh (SUB), International Islamic University Chittagong (IIUC), Port City International University (PCIU) and University of Information Technology and Science (UIT). Consents are taken from the participants before they are given the questionnaire. They are also informed that they can terminate their participation any time they want. Permission ARE taken from Deans and Chairpersons of various faculties in the above mentioned universities. At IIUC female campus, Bohoddarhat, the researcher is fortunate enough to gather students of different departments who happily agree to fill up the questionnaires. Students are given guidelines on how to write their background information and respond to the Likert scale items. Data is collected from fifty students. Students enjoy the experience.

3.6 Data Analysis Procedure
In this research, MS Word is employed to analyze the quantitative data. Each of the variables corresponding to an item on the Likert scale is converted into the percentage. Tables are used to show the percentages. These data will be used to verify the findings from quantitative data.

3.7 Limitations
It is observed that, conducting this research on learner autonomy, where data has to be collected from students, has been really challenging. Due to unstable political condition and continual strikes, students’ presence on the campuses has been feeble. There is also problem lying with time constraint. In this study, only students are taken as samples, but if it could include teachers also as samples, then the result could have been more reliable. This research explores learner autonomy in only small number of universities in Bangladesh, that is, only in Chittagong, and so it is not generalizable to other context. Even if the universities where this research has been carried out are representative universities of Bangladesh, it cannot however be claimed that the present study will be compatible with all universities in Bangladesh.
4: Results and Discussion

In this chapter the overall findings of the research are presented. Here the research questions on autonomy in learning English as a foreign language at tertiary level in Bangladesh are answered. The data collected from the participants mainly

4.1 Quantitative data with analysis

The quantitative data for this research comes from questionnaire which is analysed below

4.1.1 Learning English without teachers

![Pie chart showing the distribution of responses to the question of learning English without teachers.]

Figure 2: Analyzing students’ learning English without teachers

Participants are asked if they can learn English without their teachers. 42% disagree and 4% strongly disagree saying that they can learn English without their teachers. 30% agree and likewise 6% strongly agree that they cannot learn English without their teachers. 18% seem to be unaware of this.

Regarding learning English within one’s institution, most of the participants disagree with it. So it is seen in figure: 3 that a majority of 36% disagree and 22% strongly
disagree that English should be learnt only within one’s institution.

Figure 3: Analyzing learning English within one’s institution

A meagre amount of 4% may be unaware of this but 22% agree and 16% strongly agree that English should be learnt within one’s institution.

4.1.3 Learning English better outside the class

Figure 4: Analyzing students’ learning English better outside the class

Participants are asked if they learn English better outside the class. To this 40% respondents disagree and 2% strongly disagree. Whereas, 34% participants claim that they can learn English better outside the class. 24% participants seem to be unaware about this. So, it is seen that are classroom oriented. They feel that teachers are indispensable for teaching English language.
4.1.4 **Students should learn English more by themselves than by their teachers.**

Regarding learning English by students themselves rather than by teachers, 42% of respondents admit the importance of their own efforts for learning English and 16% strongly agree to it.

![Figure 5: Analyzing learners’ learning English by themselves than by their teachers](image)

Whereas, 34% participants are of the opinion that teacher’s role is very important for their success in EFL. They believe they should depend on teachers. However, the rest 4% do not show any interest in this matter as seen in figure: 5.

4.1.5 **English should be learnt more at home than within the language class.**

![Figure 6: Analyzing learning English more at home than within language class](image)

Participants are asked if English should be learnt more at home than within the language class. 40% agree to this supported by 12% who strongly agree. 24% disagree and do not support it. 20% participants are not sure about it.

4.1.6 **Ability to organize learning materials without the help of teacher**
Figure 7: Analyzing learners’ ability to organize materials without the help of teacher

About the ability to organise their learning materials, 40% respondents admit that they cannot organize their own materials. 34% agree that they can organize their own learning materials without teacher’s help. 8% remain unsure about this matter.

4.1.7 Need of teacher’s help to organize what to learn next

Figure 8: Analyzing need of teacher’s help to organize what to learn next

Participants are asked whether they need teacher’s help in organizing what to learn next. 62% agree and they are supported by 28% participants who strongly agree that they need teacher’s help indicating that they are dependent on teachers. Only 4% respondents disagree about requiring teacher’s help.

4.1.8 Student’s ability to plan schedule to support learning
Figure 9: Analyzing student’s ability to plan schedule to support learning

About planning schedule, 70% respondents agree that they can take initiatives in planning their own schedule. 24% strongly agree to this. Only 6% participants disagree to it. So, the participants may be considered to be aware of the importance of self efforts for their learning in EFL context.

**4.1.9 Ability to evaluate one’s own learning**

Figure 10: Analyzing ability to evaluate one’s own learning

About 54% students agree that they can evaluate their own learning. 22% participants strongly agree to this. 14% participants strongly agree to this. 14% opine that they are unable to evaluate their own learning. 10% participants are unaware about it.

**4.1.10 Self study is more interesting without teacher**
Regarding self study without teacher, 32% respondents go against the opinion and clearly show that they are teacher–dependent. 30% agree and they are further supported by 16% of participants who strongly agree, that they find more interest in self study. 16% participants remain neutral.

**4.1.11 Lack of self-confidence in reading by oneself**

Students are asked if they fail to gain self-confidence if they read by themselves. 42% students disagree and further 12% disagree to this. Whereas, 30% state that they get no confidence. 12% remain unaware in this mater.

**4.1.12 Student’s failure to understand when reading alone**
Students are asked if they fail to understand when they read alone. 70% disagree supported by a further 8% who strongly disagree to this. This indicates that students have capacity to understand when they read on their own. 14% participants cannot understand when they read alone.

### 4.1.13 Learning strategies followed by learners

Table – 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Learning strategies followed by learners</th>
<th>1%</th>
<th>2%</th>
<th>3%</th>
<th>4%</th>
<th>5%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>There are sufficient English language learning books in my library.</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I use computers for learning computer-based English language learning activities.</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am not skilled enough to use the cell phone for learning English.</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Audio-visual equipment should be available to help me to learn English Independently.</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I do not know how to use technology for English learning.</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am not skilled enough to practice online English language-learning activities.</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I use the resources available at the university library(books, journals, magazines newspapers, DVD’s, CD’s)</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I visit the library or the students’ study room to study my English lessons</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
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</table>

1=Agree, 2= strongly agree, 3=unaware, 4=disagree, 5= strongly disagree

Participants are asked about the learning strategies followed by them. The above table shows that 62% participants use computers for learning computer–based English language learning activities. 66% participants support the use of audio–visual equipment to learn English independently. Again 46% students are eager to use library resources which motivate them in self-study. 48% participants do not visit the library for
studying English Lessons. Only 30% visit the library for study purpose and 12% are unaware of its use. Learners have the expertise and skills to use technology for English learning as is evident from the opinion of 62% participants. They disagree with the statement that learners are not skilled users of technology. 46% students strongly disagree of not knowing how to use the cell phone for learning.

4.2 Discussion
The responses of the participants to the questionnaire are matched with the research questions and the following findings from the quantitative data are discussed:

With regards to the first research question, most participants disagree to the statement in the questionnaire that, they are unable to learn English without their teachers. They are further supported by those who agree that they can learn English better by themselves without teachers. This shows that learners have confidence and they are willing to take initiatives which echoes with Holec(1981,cited in Bashir,2014,p.172) that learners are able to take charge of their learning. They do not prefer teacher-centred classroom.

Participants prefer learning English outside institution. They can learn more English at home. This point is strengthened by Harmer(2007) who remarks that students should learn not only in the class but also outside. Again, there seems to be mixed feeling as maximum participants feel that learning English within classroom is better than outside. So, these students are not familiar with the concept of learner autonomy and still adhere to teacher-centred learning. It is also observed maximum students cannot take initiatives to organize their own learning materials without teacher’s help. They need help from their teachers what they are going to learn next. This does not seem to agree with Cook (2008), who comments that learners should be able to plan and organize what is going to come next. However, they can plan their schedule and evaluate their learning which is in agreement with (O’Malley and Chamot, 1990, cited in Cook, 2008). Learners are aware of utilizing metacognitive strategies in their learning. Maximum participants seem to have developed self-confidence. They seem to understand when they read alone without teacher’s support. This agrees with Wenden(1998). It shows that students feel they have aptitude to learn. There is not much difference between the number of participants who find and who do not find
interest in reading. This supports Dornyei (1998, cited in Thanasoulas, 2000). They need to be motivated so as to get more interest in self-study.

So, it can be seen that most EFL learners do prefer autonomous learning to teacher-centred learning.

With regards to the second research question, the findings from the questionnaire reveal that students have developed their own learning strategies. EFL learners take initiatives in using technology for learning English in and outside classroom. Maximum participants unanimously agree that use of computers for learning computer-based English, practising online English language learning activities, use of various library resources are a great source of motivation in EFL learning. This accords with O’Malley and Chamot (1990, cited in Cook, 2008, p.115) who state that learners use strategies, that is, they take steps to ‘make learning successful, self-directed and enjoyable.’ This also strengthens the observation of Candy (1991) where activities are student-centred rather than teacher-centred. These strategies influence learner autonomy at tertiary level in Bangladesh.

5: Conclusion

5.1 Summary of Findings

The study in hand reveals that respondents have mixed feeling. Participants seem to have some aspects of autonomous learning and some aspects of teacher-centered learning. From the findings, it is seen that majority students lack constructivism as they depend on their teacher for learning English. They believe that their institution is the only place to learn. They need to be motivated to develop metacognitive strategies so that they can plan and organize their own lessons and learning materials. Again, many participants opine that they can plan their own schedule and evaluate themselves. They admit that they learn more English at home and understand better when they read alone. They have developed cognitive powers which support learner autonomy.

They have also developed their own learning strategies. It is a good sign that EFL learners take initiatives in using technology for learning English in and outside the classroom. Autonomous learners take initiatives and try out new things in their language learning. In this way they also practice their own learning styles.
The use of technology in EFL learning is an important factor in fostering autonomous learning and this is very much obvious from the results in the questionnaire.

5.2 Pedagogical Implications:
This study investigates the factors that affect the learner autonomy in learning English at tertiary level in Bangladesh and the reasons which create these factors. These factors are investigated through the examination and analysis of questionnaire responses. This research shows that undergraduate English learners depend on the teachers for learning English and they believe that classroom is the only place to learn English. This practice is demotivating for EFL learners. Positivism, that is, Teacher – centred classrooms should be discouraged allowing learners to take responsibility of their own learning. Learners should be trained to rely less on teachers and engage in self-study. This study shows that, students feel discouraged to study at the library or practice English outside classrooms. Students even depend on their teachers to organize what they will learn next. They feel they cannot understand what they read without teacher’s help. This implies EFL learners’ cognitive and metacognitive strategies should be motivated and enriched.

Overall, the study may help the teachers to encourage learners to plan their own lessons by developing their own learning styles and strategies by making use of technology and other resources. The study may also encourage EFL teachers to step out of their traditional methods of teaching and look into students’ insights to plan, organize their study materials and evaluate their own study, thus gradually making them autonomous.

5.3 Recommendation
This study recommends further research to be conducted in learner autonomy so as to upgrade teachers professionally as well to motivate EFL learners to be less dependent on teacher-centred learning. This study further recommends teaching system in Bangladeshi universities be innovated. English classes can be made interesting by arranging activities, and using modern technology such as audio-visual system and multimedia projectors. Computer based English learning activities and other online English learning activities can be incorporated into the syllabus. Teachers may be trained so that they are familiar with learner autonomy and incorporate it into their teaching system. Regular workshops
and seminars can be held to fulfil the purpose.
Secondly, this study also recommends that Library resources be enriched in the universities by supplying books including textbooks and other authentic materials such as magazines, journals articles newspapers and so on so that students may learn and practise outside classrooms. This will motivate learners to actively take part in self learning process. This will provide them opportunity not only to communicate with teachers but also with their peers.

5.4 Conclusion
This study seeks to identify the factors that affect learner autonomy in EFL learning in tertiary level in Bangladesh. The findings of quantitative data suggest that majority of participants prefer autonomous learning to teacher-centred learning. There are factors which affect autonomous learning and this are learners’ learning styles and strategies which include organizing learners’ study materials, evaluation of study and easy access to computer and technology – based study. Social and psychological factors such as learners ‘self esteem, motivation, self confidence and learners’ attitudes are also some factors that affect learner autonomy. These factors can be of immense influence in promoting learner autonomy at the tertiary level EFL learning in Bangladesh.

References


Appendix
List of Abbreviations

BANBEIS: Bangladesh Bureau of Education Information and Statistics  
BBA: Bachelor of Business Administration  
BSc: Bachelor of Science  
CD: Compact Disc  
DVD: Digital Versatile Disc  
EFL: English as foreign language  
GTM: Grammar Translation Method  
IIUC: International Islamic University Chittagong  
PBA: Bachelor of Business Administration  
SLA: Second language acquisition  
SUB: Southern University Bangladesh  
UC: University Grants Commission  
UITS: University of Information Technology and Sciences  
USTC: University of Science and Technology Chittagong

Questionnaire to Students

Background Information

Age: __________ years old
Sex (Please circle)
  Female                      Male

Semester that I belong to: _______
Department that I belong to: _______
My university provides good English language learning facilities. (Please circle)
  Yes                      No

Questionnaire

Please tick mark the corresponding answer (only one per line)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Unaware</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. I cannot learn English without my teachers.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>2. I should learn English within my institution.</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. I can learn English better outside the class.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
4. I should learn English more by myself than by my teachers.

5. I should learn English more at home than within my language class.

6. I can organize my own materials which I have to learn next without the help of the teachers.

7. I need help from my teacher to organize what I am going to learn next.

8. I can plan my schedule to support my learning.

9. I can evaluate my learning by myself.

10. I find self-study more interesting without my teacher.

11. I do not get any confidence if I read myself.

12. I do not understand when I read alone.

13. There are sufficient English language learning books in my university library.


15. I am not skilled enough to use the cell phone for learning English.

16. Audio-visual equipment should be available to help me to learn English independently.

17. I do not know how to use technology for English learning.

18. I am not skilled enough to practise online English language learning activities.

19. I use the resources available at the university library (books, journals magazines, newspapers, DVD’s, CD’s).

20. I visit the library or the student’s study room to study my English lessons.