Promoting Learner Autonomy through ELT Classroom Interaction

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Abstract

The present research aims to illustrate teachers' use of tasks which promote learner autonomy in ELT classroom interaction.

Extracts taken from video-recorded classroom interactions have been selected for analysis and examination in an attempt to identify the strategies which give learners more responsibilities for learning.

The findings show that teachers use certain strategies such as structuring classroom discourse to add support for learners' independent learning, providing an amount of choice for self-directed learning, collectively constructing the discourse, setting up collaborative tasks to be completed independently, and engaging students with problem-solving activities.

The findings indicate that such strategies train learners to develop independence in their approach to learning. It is proposed that the implications for promoting learner autonomy through classroom interaction should be incorporated into teacher-training programmes.

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1. Introduction

Recent literature in second language acquisition suggests that classroom tasks can be used to foster autonomous language learning habits(Dam 2001,cited in Vickers and Ene 2006). It is important, therefore to consider classroom tasks that encourage autonomous language learning behaviour.

Promoting autonomous learning is an issue of paramount importance in language learning; the conditions that facilitate self-regulated learning has received greater attention (Richardson & Placier, 2001, Sierens et al, 2009). The present research draws on these concepts of self-regulated learning to examine the tasks and strategies that satisfy learners' need for autonomy.

It should be made clear from the outset that the concept of learner autonomy is not simply setting learners to certain tasks to do on their own, but is instead a teaching methodology that enables learners take control of the learning task so that they become "empowered to engage in learning independently"(Benson&Voller,1997 cited in Vickers & Ene, 2006,p.109).

Given that learner autonomy is the desirable goal of the process of teaching, classroom interaction must necessarily involve it in its procedures. Teachers need to develop good learning strategies that help learners to be co-participants and independent in the learning process.

Training students for autonomous classroom learning is likely to improve their capacity to work independently. Learners have different learning styles (Madeline; Betty; Oxford,2003). What suits one learner may be unhelpful for another, hence the concern to foster autonomous learning. Strategies used with this goal in mind would engage students in collaborative independent self-reliant work. As Harmer (2007) puts it "learner training is a first step on the road to self-directed learning. Together with activities where students are encouraged or even (sometimes) forced to take responsibility for what they are doing, learner training gives those who are prepared to take it the possibility of real autonomy." (p.396)

A prescribed set of traditional teaching techniques that requires students to focus on the product and rote learning and never engages them to get more involved in classroom interaction is unlikely to enable them to develop independence as language users. The present research, therefore, investigates the teaching strategies which enhance autonomous learning habits; it illustrates how teachers can take more steps towards learner autonomy through classroom interaction tasks.

2. Problem of the research

The idea of this research stems from the fact that most classroom interactions in Syria are teacher dominated (Hasan,1993). Although educationalists have been encouraging learners to become more independent in their approach to language learning, teachers still use a set textbook and control learners' learning. "The idea that textbooks produce a kind of dependency culture among teachers and learners is echoed by Littlejohn(1992) " (Hutchinson and Torres (1994,p.315) .This might be due to the inappropriate use of materials, teaching tasks and strategies that entitle learners to get control over their learning and become more autonomous.

The problem of this research can be stated as follows: " Which teaching tasks promote learner autonomy through classroom interaction?"

3. Review of literature

Research has indicated that autonomy supportive teaching leads to intrinsic motivation (e.g. Reeve & Jang, 2006) and higher performance (Vansteenkiste, Simons, Lens, Sheldon & Deci, 2004) and satisfy the need for autonomy and self-determination (Reeve, Ryan, Deci & Jang, 2007).

The self–determination theory (Deci and Ryan, 2000, Vansteenkiste, Lens & Deci, 2006) investigates the conditions that facilitate self-regulation learning(SRL).Based on this theory, Sierens et al (2009) looked at learning activities fostered by teachers who provide support

and structure. Their study has demonstrated the interacting role of autonomy support and structure in relation to SRL.

Sierens et al (2009) have investigated the synergistic relationship of perceived teacher autonomy support and the provision of structure in the prediction of self-regulated learning. In other words, they used a correlational design to study the interplay between teacher autonomy support and structure and their relation to self- regulated learning (SRL).

The sample of their study consisted of 526 Belgian students who completed questionnaires assessing perceived autonomy support, structure, and self- regulated learning. They were in their last year of secondary education and their first year in higher education.

The findings of the study reveal that autonomy support and structure were found to be positively correlated. Structure was associated with self-regulated learning under conditions of moderate and high autonomy support. Teachers provided help and instructions when students wanted to evaluate themselves and plan their study activities.

The study concludes by saying "when teachers want their students to evaluate themselves, to plan their study activities, and to think about themselves as learners, the teachers are encouraged to provide help, instructions and expectations in an autonomy-supportive way (p.57)."

Vickers and Ene (2006) explored advanced ESL learners' ability to make improvements in grammatical accuracy by autonomously noticing and correcting their own grammatical errors. They worked with 13 advanced ESL students and engaged them in an explicit task in which they compared their own use of grammatical form in their own written output to the use of grammatical form as used in a text written by a native speaker. Based on such comparison, subjects were able to correct their grammatical errors. The findings of this study indicate that such a comparison allows learners to make gains in grammatical accuracy.

Nunes (2004) carried out a study with a group of 10^{th}- grade students in a Portuguese high school. She argues for introducing portfolios in ESL classrooms to enable learners to adopt a more learner-centred practice.

The study reports on students' feedback and suggests how they can help the teacher make informed decisions in the classroom. Students reflections can also contribute to a greater student involvement and to more autonomous learning. As students self-monitor their own learning, they become more autonomous.

Ho and Crookall (1995) provided a concrete example of how the ordinary classroom can be transformed into a learning environment that promotes learner autonomy through the use of large scale simulations. They described how learners take responsibility for their learning by making decisions about their learning, plan, evaluate, monitor and assess. They illustrated how such a methodology can be used to create a learning environment.

They concluded that it is through concrete actions of taking responsibility that autonomy is learned. The simulation project enabled learners to develop certain skills and attitudes which are characteristics of learner autonomy. The findings of the study suggest that taking responsibility can only be encouraged by learner participation in a personally- meaningful real-world context such as simulation.

Little (1995) examined learner autonomy in formal language learning contexts (schools, colleges and universities). He focused on learning strategies and learner training and on the pedagogical dialogue and the role of the teacher. He argued that when learning strategies and learner training can play an important role in the development of learner autonomy, the development of autonomy in learners presupposes the development of autonomy in teachers through interaction and interdependence. The study has implications that teachers should be subject to the training process required for the promotion of learner autonomy.

It can be seen that the above-mentioned studies are related to the present research in the sense that they have explored the conditions which facilitate learning and give students more responsibility for learning. However, the present study investigates, through classroom interaction data, how teachers use certain tasks and strategies to train learners to be more autonomous in their approach to learning the language.

In the majority of cases, the concept of learner autonomy has been associated with independent learning tasks outside the classroom such as self-access centres. Little Research has investigated learner autonomy through classroom interaction (Vickers & Ene, 2006). It should be noted that there are other studies on classroom interaction, but they have not investigated learner autonomy as such (Jenks,2007; Markee & Kasper, 2004; Liebscher & Dailey-O'Cain,2003;Walsh.2002). Through a detailed analysis of ELT classroom extracts, the study has focused on a fairly new dimension in the context of classroom discourse studies; that is, the investigation of learners autonomy through classroom interaction tasks.

4. Significance of the research

The significance of the research stems from the following points:

1. Pointing out the interactional features of potential autonomous classroom discourse.
2. Investigating the effective teaching strategies which promote learner autonomy
3. Illustrating how learners can cope with autonomous learning tasks.
4. Making the most of the findings for teacher training in the Syrian Context

5. Aims

The research attempts to provide answers to the following questions:

1. Which strategies are teachers to use to train students to become more autonomous?
2. Do learners take advantage of those strategies for their independent learning?
3. How do learners engage themselves into learning tasks independently?

4. What are the implications for learner training to promote autonomous learning?

6. Methodology

This paper is based on a database of transcripts of video-recorded extracts taken from English classroom interaction. The database includes three classroom interactions delivered in different countries England, Spain and France. It is perhaps an advantage to look at such transcribed extracts taken from a variety of settings. These transcripts were prepared for the development of teachers of English for observation and reflection. It will be interesting to see how teachers across a variety of teaching contexts act. Such an analysis of data is intended to raise the awareness of teachers about these international patterns of interaction, perhaps to be adapted and adopted in the Syrian context.

A conversation analysis approach is used to illustrate the teaching strategies used to promote learner autonomy.

7. Analysis of Data

The following analysis of classroom extracts looks at how teachers deal with tasks and activities not as predetermined straitjackets for learners, but rather to promote autonomous learning. It is an attempt to show how teachers can help students generate their own learning habits such as collectively constructing the discourse, solving problems and making their own choice of their learning strategies by providing models, structure and support through the provision of learning opportunities.

7.1. Support and Structure

Structure and autonomy support are helpful environments for promoting autonomous learning; structure helps learners accomplish their learning tasks by providing learners with directions and guidelines for self-regulatory learning. Structure provides learners with help for engaging in a task so that they better know how to accomplish the task and achieve their goals. Tucker et al (2002) demonstrate that structure is

related to the more student engagement and less passive behaviour as structure allows for the satisfaction of the need for competence.

On the other hand, autonomy support provides the willingness (autonomy) to initiate these self-regulatory strategies. "Autonomy support nurtures students' interest and intrinsic motivation and promotes the endorsement of their classroom activities, so that students engage in their studies in a more volitional way."(Sierens et al, 2009, P.60).This sort of feeling of autonomy would allow for the use of self-regulating learning strategies.

The following extract illustrates how students are guided to be involved in a role-play activity and to get engaged in conversation in an independent fashion.

1.T: Don't speak so much. Good, you're going to do something similar to what these people have done on the tape, OK? Er… one of you is going to be the doctor, and another of… one is going to be a patient. OK? The patient is going to have a strip of paper. On this paper you write the illness. It can be one of these, it can be some other, OK? But don't make it too difficult. Some illness you've had. This way you'll know the symptoms, OK? You don't show it to the doctor, you just keep it. And let's see if the doctors are good, and they guess the illness, OK? The doctors have this kind of sheet, where they have to take note of the patient's information like… what kind of questions do you think the doctor will ask?

2.S: Where does it hurt?

3.T: If it's the first time the doctor goes.. the patient goes to the doctor's, he will have to know.?

4.S: The name.

5.T: The name,

6.St: The age.

7.T: Address, probably. The age. Then, about the illness, what kind of questions did this doctor ask, the one in the book?

8. S: Since when,.. does it hurt?

9. T: OK. Wha...how long has it...been happening to him, when did it start? Other kind of things. He will probably try to, er.. well guess, what the illness is, and then give a treatment, OK? You just.. note form. Don't write long sentences. Note forms, OK? The person I give this sheet to is the doctor, the person I give this strip of paper to is the patient, OK? [Fade out and in)

10. T: The patient just writes the illness. The doctor can go thinking what kind of questions he'll ask, and then starts asking. And takes note of the patient's answers. If you need help, raise your hand and ask.

It will be seen from this extract that a rich autonomous supportive environment is clearly displayed and portrayed. The teacher provides a clear model on the tape for students to imitate and follow in order to do the task on their own, 'you are going to do something similar to what these people have done on the tape. OK." (turn: 1).Through this modeling process, students are likely to follow their self-regulatory strategy in learning. It should be remembered that modeling has been proved to be an effective pedagogic strategy in classrooms in terms of motivating learners to develop improved reading strategies (Pani, 2004).

In the above extract, the teacher has set students a task to do something similar and practise the language through an information-gap activity which is intended to enable students to practise using the

language in a real-life communicative situation. By exchanging roles (doctor-patient) students bridge the gap and get more motivated and involved into the talk through guessing," And let us see if the doctors are good and they guess the illness, OK." (turn: 1)

It can be seen from the above extract that the teacher provides guidelines and structure in a supportive way to promote students engagement with the task. Directions such as' 'one of you is going to be the doctor, and another of…one is going to be the patient. OK? (turn: 1) " help students engage in the task properly. The teacher here is actually using an autonomy-supportive strategy by providing the necessary guidelines to direct students behaviour. These sorts of directions and guidelines provide support for students; learners need this kind of support, guidance and clarification to make the most of their independent attempts to learn

It should be noted that the information-gap task here provides valuable opportunities for learning. Furthermore, the teacher negotiates it with the learners how to perform the task. He uses a comprehension check strategy to make sure that students have understood the sort of questions they are going to use in performing the patient-doctor exchange. "What kind of questions do you think the doctor will ask?" (turn: 1). Furthermore, he elaborates on their responses to his enquiry about their comprehensibility and at other times reformulates their answer, "OK. What – how long has it… been happening to him, when did it start?" (turn: 9). He adds further clarifications of the type of questions the doctor will ask. In the meanwhile, the teacher also gives directions on the kind of responses the students are required to produce. "Don't write long sentences, note forms" (turn: 9). An emphasis is placed on the content rather than the form to develop a dialogue between the students themselves. It should be noted that such a kind of the negotiation for meaning will provide a greater degree of strategic competence.

To add further support to students' learning, the teacher even offers help while doing the task:

T: The patient just writes the illness. The doctor can go thinking what kind of questions he'll ask, and then starts

asking. And takes note of the patient's answers. If you need help, raise your hand and ask.

Structuring the task that way in a helpful supportive context provides respect for learners' attempt to express their ideas, and learners are more likely to follow the structure with more freedom and attempt to elaborate on their own ideas. This sort of help would enable learners to carry on performing the task independently. Students need to have things explained and to be guided and given constructive feedback and help.

This would enable them to effectively monitor their own behaviour. Students then imitate the techniques in their own learning. This is in line with the hypothesis advanced by Sierens et al (2009) hypothesis that "teachers who are effective in supporting students' need for autonomy on average tend to be effective in offering help and positive feedback, setting limits, and introducing rules (i.e. structure)". (p. 60).

This would enable students to be familiar with the know-how to use self-regulatory strategies. The extract above depicts in detail how students get effectively engaged in self-regulatory strategies, which reflects the student-centred teaching dimension.

The teacher's role in such circumstances is meant to guide students to learn the FL which would in turn foster their attempt to be more independent. As Gil (2002) puts it "the role of the teacher is to guide the students to learn the rules of this complex metalinguistic game through which the essential skills for both foreign language classroom communication and teaching can be learnt" (p. 278).

Other instances where students are given a model to imitate through their learning practice recur in the data.

And last night I gave this piece of paper that you have to a friend of mine and I said to her, 'Choose two of these, two of these unfinished drawings, and finish them in some way.' Er… I'll show you what she.. she came up with. Let's see if it'll come up here. She choose the two on the left-hand side, here, and that's how she filled it in. I'd like you to do the

same. Choose two of the unfinished drawings, and finish them in some way. You have three minutes to do it.

Here, the teacher expects students to base their independent learning on the model as provided by the teacher. He expects students to follow the model and finish the drawings on their own. Moreover, he gave them some time to do it, "you have got three minutes to do it." (turn: 1). By giving them a deadline to do the task, learners would be in a better position to do the task on their own.

It should be remembered that tasks that set up ways for learners to take control of their learning by deciding how to choose and complete the task, "Choose two of the unfinished drawings, and finish them in some way" promote independent learning. Such tasks would allow for a greater degree of independence. It involves students and provokes their thinking as they engage in accomplishing the task.

7.2. Choice:

Teachers who support students autonomy provide them with an amount of choice. Murray (1999) views learner autonomy as a process whereby learners exercise control and assume responsibility of their learning by making decisions or choices (p. 296).

T. Then exercise two. Choose the most likely answer to the following questions. So, I'd like you to do that one, you can do this alone, if you like, or do it with somebody else, if you find easier… Um… check the paragraphs with the ones I have on the board, before you do the questions. And while you're waiting have a look through part two.

This extract shows that the teacher encourages the use of an independent strategy. The teacher provides students with a task to answer the questions and ask them to make choices about which strategies they like to use. By providing students with an amount of choice (Katz & Assor, 2007) teachers create an autonomy-supportive environment. Here,

an opportunity is provided for students to practise the language and get involved in the learning activity.

It should be remembered that autonomy-supportive teachers take into account their students' learning styles. Learners must be able to choose learning materials and learning strategies by themselves; selecting their own ways of participation would benefit their learning. This would encourage learners to have sufficient confidence and competence to say what they want to say and how to say it. In other words, learners have the choice to learn the language according to their own strategies.

To engage learners in choosing how they learn enables them to become more aware of the effective learning strategies they use. This would, in turn, give them the freedom to transfer the learning strategies from the training context to any other novel setting which they may encounter, and to choose the most appropriate strategies to the task at hand.

Moreover, it should be noted that" providing choice and allowing opportunities for self-direction behaviour have been found to enhance intrinsic motivation by increasing the feeling of autonomy" (Deci and Ryan 1985, cited in Young 2005, p. 37).

The following extract opens more doors for students to choose their own topics when practising the structure "used to".

1. *T: Now, I would like you to work in pairs, with your partner, and, er...let's try to reproduce, sort of dialogue. [writes on board] You can talk about, er...your appearance. You can talk about, er... your, spare time, or.. the books, you read, or...the places... you went to... and so on. So thi...there are some cues, but of course you can speak about whatever you like. Er...the dialogue will consist of, er…A, for example, says, er...'What..', make a question... makes a question to B, for example, 'What did you use to look like when you were a little girl?' And B answers, 'Well, I used to have long, curly hair'. And*

A agrees, or disagrees. Hmm? If she agrees, 'Oh! So did I'. If she disagrees, 'Oh, I didn't'. And then B makes another question, to A; 'And what about you, did you use to wear glosses?' for example, and A answer 'Oh, yes, I did'. Right, so try to use short answers, 'yes I did', hmm? 'No, I didn't', or 'Nor did I'. Hmm? Is it clear? Just two minutes in pairs, and then you will speak aloud. Right? And you want to ask me any question, I will be ready to help you.

[Students work in pairs]

2. S 1: What did you use to go, in the…

3. S 2: I, er… used, er…to spend my holidays in Bilbao or Palencia because I used to live in Madrid.

[Fade out and in]

4. T: OK? So, let's begin. Hmm? Let's break the ice. Estivaliz, can you play with, er… Rocio?

5. S 3: Er...what did you use to look like as a child?

6. S 4: Er…when I was a child…I used to be very fat, but now I don't eat too much, and I was thin.

7. T: Yes, great! What about you, can you make…?

8. S 3: No, I didn't. I was very thin, and… I used to have short, blonde hair.

9. T: Really?

10. S 4: And, what did use to… to do in your spare time?

11. T: Good!

12. S 3: I used to play with my sisters, at home.

13. S 4: I… didn't.

14. T: You didn't?

15. S 4: No.

16. T: Did you like… er… do you have any, I mean, have you got sisters or brothers to play with?

17. S 4: Yes, er… I wa… well, bueno [=well], I am, er…one, er… sister, but I was, er…ten years, er…he was, er…one year.

18. T: Oh, I see. So different ages. Good.

This extract clearly displays a rich environment for learner autonomy. Based on a model dialogue on the use of the structure "used to", students were asked to construct their own dialogue.

The teacher suggests certain topics to form the content of the dialogue, but he leaves the door open for students to choose their own topics, "but of course you can speak about whatever you like." (turn: 4). Here an opportunity for students to make their own decisions on deciding which topic to talk about is offered. By doing so, the teacher gives more responsibility to learners, a free pattern of interaction. Learners here are given more freedom in the choice and development of the content of the topic; they are encouraged to get involved and take more responsibility for their own learning.

The teacher gives students more support by giving them the chance to ask for further illustrations, "And you want to ask me any question, I will be ready to help you." (turn: 4)

7.3. Constructing Discourse:

There is evidence in the data where both teacher and students attempt to construct the discourse together.

1. T. OK, who wants to be doctor, who wants to be patient? Nobody?

2. S. No.

3. T. OK, you said no, lket. You're the doctor, you're the patient.

4. S. I'm the doctor?

5. S. Yes.

6. S. Tu' "the patient", [you are the patient, you start.].

7. S. Er.. it's a really bad pain, doctor. Down here.

8. S. Which side?

9. S. This side.

10. S. How long has this been going on? When did it start?

11. S. Yesterday morning, doctor. I thought perhaps… perhaps it was indigestion, but it's too bad for that.

12. S. Mmm. OK..

13. T. Er… it's not exactly.OK.

14. Class: All right.

15. T. All right. All right. You got the idea.

16. S. Now just… lay down…. here.

17. T. how do you spell that?

18. S. L… A?

19. T. No. the other… it's the other verb.

20. S. I.

21. T. L-I-E. And three tenses of to lie are lie, lay…?

22. Class: lain.

23. T. Lain. This is a confusing verb, OK? Go on. Now just lie down here.

24. S. That's right. Now, where exactly does it hurt? Is it here?

25. S. Oh, yes.

The extract shows how the teacher and students are collectively constructing the interaction. By assigning a role-play activity for students to work on, the teacher is actually opening the door for them to construct their own interaction. An opportunity for language use is provided here to develop student-student interaction; this is the sort of discourse that holds students responsible to accomplish the task on their own.

After setting the task, the teacher withdraws and allows learners to construct the interaction by themselves. At the beginning, the invitation to instruct and take part in the interaction is acted by a peer, "Student: I am the doctor?" Student: "Yes" (turn: 4-5), thus allowing other learners to take some responsibility for explanations and instructions.

However, the teacher keeps monitoring the interaction and provides assistance whenever learners need it. He provides support to let the interaction move straightforward, "All right, all right. You got the idea" (turn: 14). He leaves enough room, though, for students to manage their own interaction. Learners, on the other hand, are engaged into communicating with each other to accomplish their task, hence the focus is on the completion of the task.

The managerial role of the teacher can be clearly seen through setting up the task, organizing it and guiding students, encouraging them to contribute to the completion of the task. In addition, the teacher acts as a language resource to performing the task by providing words and

corrections as students need them. For example, the teacher's intervention to check spelling "how do you spell that?" (turn: 17) seems to provide means for students to develop their cognitive ability to use the language correctly and foster their development. This is in line with Lightbown and Spada's (1999) argument that SLA research shows how classroom language teaching helps learners draw attention to "form" (i.e. elements of language) through the process of communication. Such a kind of instruction is likely to allow learners not only to focus on form but also to promote learning skills to carry out with them beyond the classroom.

The constant interplay along constructing classroom discourse is a paramount feature of the foreign language classroom. Despite the fact that the teacher has the most talking rights, classroom discourse should be collectively constructed to foster development. In this way, the classroom becomes a better environment for learning as the "distance between the teacher and the learners is reduced". (Gil, 2002, p.278).

7.4. Collaborative tasks:

By setting up collaborative tasks for students to work on and allowing tasks to be completed independently, more learning opportunities are provided in the classroom to enhance their autonomy as can be noticed in the following extract:

1. *T. Well, I'm going to give you a sheet for you to write the patient's illness and the patient's name, OK? You have to guess, you can't write on this sheet of paper, you are going to write here. Patient's name, and what illness do you think he has. Or he or she. OK., you write it here. ER… do not write here please. Let's pass it this way….*

"Everybody's ready? It's not a race, eh? It's not a race. One, two, three, you can start. You read it, and you guess that the patient illness is.

[class works in groups].

T. [to groups] finished?

S. No, yes.

S: [To partner] . . stay in bed and have cold water. And, this...drink a lot. A lot of...liquid.

T: OK? Just… we'll call out some names, and let's see if you agree on the illness. Er…let's see… Ander?

S: A stomachache. A stomachache. A stomachache. Teacher: A stomachache. A stomachache. Yes? Yes? Indigestion? Well, OK, we could accept that. Appendicitis?

S: Don't have take, er...er...hot liquid now. Teacher: He mustn't take hot liquids. He mustn't drink hot /liquids. So you say it's.. appendicitis? With appendicitis you mustn't drink hot liquids? I don't know, I've never had it. Er… but, who wrote… Gorka's? So, what is it exactly?

S: A stomachache.

T: It's a stomachache.

The teacher asks students to collaborate on a task: writing the "illness and the patient's name". The teacher here models and explains how the students should do the task and gives more rules for participation. He has made it clear that it is a cooperative task but not a competition "It's not a race, eh." (turn: 1) Moreover, he has given enough instructions to do the task in groups to make sure that they are fully aware of what they are supposed to do.

Here students are encouraged to take ideas, build on each other contributions to find out the illness name and the patient's name. Students attempt to find out that by themselves with the support of teachers' intervention for clarification and feedback.

The teacher rephrases students' responses in a more acceptable form and elaborates on them to encourage learners' contributions and elicit their initiations. Feedback is used here to provide supportive information to build on students' responses and develop their contributions and extend the discussion. Students need to receive this sort of feedback to promote their independent learning. Ryan (1982) indicates that "Informational feedback maintains the sense of perceived autonomy, and increases intrinsic motivation". (P. 38). However, Ryan maintains that "a controlling style of feedback which stresses the particular outcomes reduces perceived autonomy and motivation."

This collaborative work has the potential role of developing autonomy. It helps students to take responsibility not only for their learning but also for helping the others in the group.

7.5. Problem-Solving Activities:

Another way of enhancing autonomy is to provide learners with problem-solving activities to try on their own, as the following extract shows:

1. T. so, on each of these cards, I've got… pictures of objects. OK? But in each case there is a problem with the object. What I'd like you to do is to describe the problem, in the simplest of words. OK?

2. Class. OK.

3. Teacher: What do we have to do? Karine, can you explain?

4. Karine: We have, er… to describe what it's wrong, er… in the object.

5. Teacher: Right, so take you pick [Hands out cards].

6. Karine: Can we say the.. the name of the object?

7. Teacher: Yes, of course, yes. It's not a secret.

8. Karine: Thanks.

9. Class [Read cards].

10. Teacher [to student] you've got two? Are you OK?

11. Student: Mmmm.

12. Teacher: No. well, if it's that easy, I'm going to give you another one.

13. Karine: Can I choose?

14. Teacher: [Hands out cards] OK. All you can do with this is check if you are right, but you can't find the word. OK? It's just English – English.

OK. I'd like you just to check with the person next to you that they.. you think it's right. OK? So can you just say what you think the problem is, to your… to the person next to you… And you three, could you check together.

15. Monique: [To partner] There is no more, um… picture on the TV. When people op…er…take it, er…up. I don't know it. Er…they don't…see.

16. Karine: Mmmm.

17. Monique: Er….pictures.

18. Karine: It's the screen? Doesn't work?

19. Monique: The screen. Yes. It's… You have like, er…er…like, er…in a oscillographe [=oscillograph] or something like that. Only, er… like, er…

20. Karine: You have white, on the… the screen?

21. Monique: Yes.

22. Karine: Yeah?

23. Monique: Yes.

24. Karine: So it's, er… the matter with the TV, yeah?

25. Monique: Yes.

26. Karine: It's fine?

27. Monique: Yes.

28. Karine: OK. So mine… is, um… a calculator. You know, the machine to, er… to make number?

29. Monique: Yes.

30. Karine: And, er… as same of you, the screen, er.. doesn't work very well.

31. Monique: Is it a calculator or is it a computer?

32. Karine: No, it's a calculator.

In this extract the teacher has assigned students some problems to solve in pairs and groups of three. Before letting students engage into the task, the teacher ensured comprehensibility and intelligibility of the task. He checked whether students have understood what they are supposed to do or not. 'What do we have to do? Karine, can you explain?" (turn: 3). This sort of seeking clarification is more likely to maximize the learning potential in the classroom.

Students collaborate together to find out the problem with the objects displayed on cards; they are asked to check together their answers. This joint decision to find out problems holds students responsible for effective learning and engagement with the task. They even started to ask the teacher to clarify what they are supposed to do. "Can we say the… the name of the object?" (turn: 6). Moreover, they wanted to take decisions

by choosing a certain problem, 'can I choose?" (turn: 13). Through such question-explanation interaction students are trying to find a way to understand the requirement of the task better.

This sort of checking for clarification keeps the channel of communication open and leads to greater involvement and precision of language. It should be recalled that requests for clarification are to be encouraged not only from teacher to learners, but more importantly from learners to teachers. By self-selecting "can I choose?" the learners take responsibility for initiating instruction where the teacher responds to it. Learners have the freedom to select their turns as next speakers self-selection allows learners to share the responsibility for developing the activity.

8. Conclusion

This study has investigated learners' autonomy in the ELT classroom interaction, an aspect that has not been covered in some detail in literature. The examination of classroom interaction extracts has shown that teachers can set learners' interactive tasks and use teaching strategies whether in the form of collaborations with their teacher or with classroom peers that would allow them to work on their own.

The potential learner training resulting from engaging in such tasks in explicit interactive processes in the ELT classroom interaction suggests that learner autonomy can be nurtured inside the classroom. We need creative strategies to involve students in autonomous learning; helping students to increase their self-learning is an investment that can result in their efforts to learn. We also need experienced and confident teachers to encourage independent learning.

The findings of this research can be of immediate use to be implemented in teacher educators programme to raise their awareness of the teaching strategies that promote learner autonomy. A serious attempt should be made to identify those strategies so that they become part of the content of teacher training programmes.

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