

Original Paper

Exploring Dimensions of Learner Autonomy: An Ecological Perspective

Sonia Sharmin¹

¹ Department of English, Islamic University, Bangladesh

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Abstract

A shift from a focus on the learner as an autonomous agent to one that places greater emphasis on the learner's relationship with their learning environment is a hallmark of learner autonomy. Learning settings are complex, with many aspects influencing outcomes; metaphors like ecology shed light on this. Ecological perspectives highlight the importance of students negotiating their environment through purposeful behaviours within interrelated contexts. Awareness, flexibility, and goal-setting are the three main tenets of pedagogy for autonomy. This perspective tackles societal influences head-on, highlighting the need of welcoming spaces and being creative to boost independence. In general, the ecological viewpoint deepens comprehension by drawing attention to the ever-changing relationships between students and their classroom settings.

Keywords

learner autonomy, ecology, learners, environment

1. Introduction

When someone wants to know what learner autonomy is, he finds this easy definition like ‘the ability to take charge of one’s own learning (Holec, 1981). The learner is totally responsible for all of the decisions concerned with his learning and the implementation of those decisions. Here learner autonomy indicates to “more a condition than the capability of an individual being” (Palfreyman, 2014, p. 370). For establishing literacy or creating a lifelong learner, the above “situation” and/ or “ability” seem to be worthwhile with a view to augment instruction, or to substitute instruction by lessening reliance upon instructors. Later on, it is reaffirmed that the completely autonomous learner acts on freely of textbook, classroom or teacher. This perspective concentrates on an independent and single learner compared to, qualities of teaching -learning

surrounding that often seem to be indispensable. So, this learner-centred view of autonomy uses textbook, class environment, teacher as powerful obstacle to self- education.

The argument of Benson (2001) settles on liberty from circumstantial restriction: “Personal autonomy is [...] a quality of the socially produced individual being. Individuals must strive to lead autonomous lives and society must strive to respect the freedoms that such lives require” (p. 18). Within this paper, terms like context, autonomy and learning are looked at from a more beneficial disposition like, what type of situations promote agency, and in what way a student interconnects independently with his/her situation? In the current age, learning context has been treated as a metaphor like ecology. Metaphor is used here to get a good understanding and conceiving of everyday aspect of life. (cited in Palfreyman, 2014)

The usage of metaphor works like an opening of our knowledge of learning throw our attention from the rest. Action of human as a form of metaphor is taken as ecology. Following the ecology which is of two types like natural ecology (a river or a jungle) and a cultivated ecology (an orchard), is an organization of negotiating entity that prey on one another, battle with one another or at times strive in synergy. For instance, in the river, fish exist on nutrient element and across the river and using oxygen and nitrogen that are left from biotic. Here, nutrimental sustenance for pest, parasites and so on are generated by the garbage and the river creature. Similarly, the situation of learning is an approach, Following the similar manner, the situation of learning is order, drawing out the interconnection between teaching learning materials, instructors, learners and extra materials.

The metaphor of ecology is to converse about the kinship between context and language. It focuses on the unlikeness of residents and the alliance between the residents’ dwellers formed in organic and linguistic ecologies. To define “the community psychology”, importance is given on some features of ecology that can be noticed in communal organizations (cited in Palfreyman, 2006, p. 72). Among these four, the first one is interdependence: Various branches of eco systems are inter related, hence alteration in one portion of it brings a wrinkle impact on the rest (p. 72); and then the next one is ‘the recognition, progression, and distribution of *wealth within* order’ (p. 72). After that, the equal opportunity suggested by the first assumption is an active *one* (inhabitants and process need to endure and modify to swapping situation’ (p. 72) and finally, it needs a *historical* standpoint that will investigate not the current situation but to the previous sources and subsequent results.

2. Rethinking Ecology

Though the lens of ecology metaphor, learning can be viewed in different manners. Here the framework of resources suggested by Palfreyman (2006) such as material resources like a computer, internet or textbook can be used by the learner, as well as, social resources like sufficient contact with a role model like elder sibling or native speaker are used. Needless to say,

only the existence of the resources in the environment of learners does not ensure their contribution to learning; different other factors moderate for learners' intercommunication with these resources. For instance, a lexicography provides specific affordances like probable activities accessible in the situation to a learner, self-reliant of the learners' capability to comprehend them. The idea of affordances has become very important in the theory of the usage of technology. Similarly, in traditional assets, it seems to be applicable. Like the technology, the lexicography contains pages with information of millions of words, idioms, phrases and expressions in a very chronological manner. The provided information works like a mentor so that learner's acquisition, comprehension and production of a lexical item can be supported, but the content is an amalgamation of functional language as well as technical signs like phonetic transcription which urges for particular knowledge to decipher and to use it. The practicality of a lexicography of an individual pupil with his context relies on the motivation, skill and some other factors. For example, a student facing an unknown word in the magazine might not use of dictionary because of time constraint, unwillingness, even he might find the mistaken word, or incorrect meaning for the situation or might face problem putting the lexicon meaning to the situation where he meets the word; or he might misconceive the meaning or abbreviation. In the same way, aspects start up when a male student who faces difficulty in using a particular grammatical item and, upon the existence of social resource like a girl classmate having a profound knowledge on it, he cannot find the solution. For instance, he might not know that she knows how to use grammatical item, or she might seem so busy that he cannot ask questions, in such a situation, in spite of existing social resources, the boy student might wait for the teacher to ask and not regard the classmate as a dependable one of guidance. A complete set of affordances that are to be selected and exploited by learners as materials are elaborately mentioned here. Specifically, the focal point will be enabling resources like human beings or printing texts; they ease approach to learning resources namely motivation and knowledge that comes up with straight to learning. The components acting on the capability of learners to reap benefits from the elements of the lexicography or the peers can be classified into (i) characteristics of activity situation, (ii) teachable learning skills, (iii) emotional variables. These components associate with each other. For instance, a skill cannot be utilized due to time constraint or due to learners' reluctance regarding the asset of learning. Moreover, the variants related to psychology have an effect to a large extent by how the pupil realizes the context of learning, and this is not an individual-centred fact; in some cases, for some students, female, male, junior sisters, senior brothers, native speakers of L2 or even teachers might be regarded inaccessible or not suitable for access because they know nothing on the certain area or those people are not interested in or the learner may not love to confront them. Issues like these are found, on a small level, on the basis of individual behavior, but at a broader perspective, on the cultural or social notions regarding what is valid or usual behavior. There is another resource termed as discursive resources (Palfreyman, 2006, p. 75), where ideas are passed on within a

social cluster via non-formal as well as formal conversation on teaching and learning. Through listening, participating, absorbing countless dialogues focusing on learning, language, institution, triumph in life, etc., a learner (vis-à-vis a teacher) collects concepts regarding learning advances particular attitude towards what is a chance of learning and what is not.

Inter-reliance is a remarkable specimen of ecology of learning. The ecological process of learning concentrates on the situation of learning along with social, material as well as discursive resources. Knowledge and learning survive more in the interactivity with the real circumstances, and less in humans only: learning is not a partial approach, rather an integrated one: the learner or professional is recognized as a person in action and in situation. He is identified by a power of action and that action can be manifested through the context where the person exists.

Learners could be identified as talented or untalented within a particular context, not in the abstract (Barab & Plucker, 2002, p. 182). The term “ecology” means an organization of humans, beliefs, custom, principles and digital tools in a local situation to refer to “a system of living beings, insights, and technologies in a specific community context”, providing instances like the ICU in hospital, Xerox machine by self-service or a library. Looking the classroom as a centre of self-help might transform concentration from the perspective of teacher-domination to learner—domination following the situation as all inclusive, where diverse participants, their objectives, goals materials and interconnection are stressed. Situation of learning can be set out at different stages such as a pair, a cluster, a group, a family, an institution, a locality, a society. The ecology of learning refers to the sub-learning contexts from which learners grow up with knowledge after interacting at each instance of context.

Learning from an ecological perspective consists of interactions among teachers, learners and diverse situations, communicated through their goals, actions and identifications, and the utilization of multiple materials. The components communicate in manners which might alter slowly or suddenly along with time. Hence, alteration in one portion of the process will bring a transformation to the other one, either increasing or decreasing from the early transformation. it will be observed in what way the individualistic idea of learner autonomy will be realized in learning ecology within the situations of non-formal as well as formal learning.

3. Autonomy in Light of Ecology

Not finding autonomous learners liberated from or released from their circumstances, rather how learners negotiating with their situation practice and foster autonomy will be considered. For this purpose, to overcome the challenge of the situation, the issue of “mediated agency” (cited in Palfreyman, 2006, p. 25) can be incorporated here. The communication between institution and the real world will be addressed in a variety way so that learners can ponder, find out and discuss their problems in such a way so that that skill and capability can be transferred innovatively to

other situation. For instance, the transformation of the skill is from the awareness of common sense to the activities of creative thinking in problematic context.

4. Pedagogy for Autonomy

From an ecological standpoint, learner autonomy just as “a capability for purposeful usage” (Holec, 1981, p. 81) in the situation of a multiple interconnected materials to reach learning objectives, will be contemplated. Purposeful refers to a special intention. One of the key factors here is awareness. An autonomous learner comprehends the material accessible to him. The awareness of availability becomes the foundation for him/her to utilize strategies of learning, meaningful negotiation with the situation that cover cognitive strategies as well as social strategies along with affective ones like confidence, attitude, motivation. Therefore, an autonomous learner will be ready to fulfill the plan, but not being unaware of his situation, inclined to be proactive.

The core feature of an autonomous learner is the ability to contribute by designing material and finding material from the surrounding environment. Moreover, he will have the knowledge how to be flexible to new elements in the context, be capable to embrace the shifts of situations through finding novel materials or appropriating new modes of utilizing them. Learners need to know how to make active use of social elements. Similarly, learner’s identity will be upheld by finding the connection between the elements of the surrounding environment and his /her endeavour to utilize it. Thus, repositioning herself in the eyes of the other reconstructs her identity.

Undertaking a learning goal is another feature of autonomy. Having a goal supports the learner by giving direction to his experience. It contradicts with the endeavor of students who possess no specific goal of learning like being passed in a course or going with the course. This might be logical in their own terms, and might produce satisfaction for them. But they are never expected to take the lead in learning further. For autonomy in language learning, definitely the goal will be the ones related to linguistic achievement; for instance, making sense of songs or achieving a band score for proficiency test. Reaching any goal constructs identity for the learner.

Going further from individual autonomy, the perspective of ecology supports us to invent how a circle or society may exhibit interconnected autonomy and eventually suits an organization of learning. According to other researcher (cited in Palfreyman, 2011, p. 76), “personal autonomy” that grows in the adolescent year, is comprised by two parts; (i) segregation from familial bonding and (ii) larger organized collaboration with fellow group. The fellow group gives help as well as compulsion to actively participate in the circle so that learners are ignited to foster autonomy. So far, our destination was ecological view of autonomy of learner as the purposeful utility in the situation of a variety of interconnecting materials to certain learning goals. At this point, the type of pedagogy that might be considered of promoting autonomy from the above-mentioned perspective is regarded.

The way of fostering autonomy is to increase students’ awareness of the materials accessible to their surroundings, which can accelerate their learning. One foundational point for increasing

awareness is utilizing the materials that learners have at hand (Barab & Plucker, 2002, p. 176). For this purpose, the usage of lexicography or digital materials to support them handling task. In the classroom environment, learners can be assigned with collaborated tasks problem solving activities, project with CLIL that can further develop their habit to tackle the similar type of issue in the real-life situation outside the classroom environment. Moreover, giving feedback on the provided resources and discussing on it will allow them to evaluate resources from their environment and select material for their own learning.

Out of the class, a huge potential exists on the availability of materials that can support students with their decision making and performing activities. But these will help less to increase learners' awareness. Following any podcast learners can practice listening and determine their performance as well as assess their progress. Even they can start writing on their own blog or their own page and go along with it.

Learners can be directed to concentrate on chances to speak in English, to read magazines, or on the situations in which they write. Thus, after creating learners' awareness about these things, they will be habituated in what to do, how and when to do and for what reasons. Thus, they create a habit of doing, rethinking, evaluating their insights beyond the class and look for occasion to produce the situation of learning. Thus, autonomy is fostered when ecology of learning is created.

Pedagogy can increase consciousness of the surviving methods of learning. In addition, it extends the variety of students' materials by focusing less scored or disregarded materials as well as assisting learners in choosing and positioning these in a diverse situation. After interacting in the same class on a certain project with different linguistic, ethnic and cultural students, learners can exchange and strengthen their perception of materials for learning.

The core point of the pedagogy of ecology for autonomous learning is creating links between dissimilar factors of learners' livings and to motivate them to find and produce innovative, analytical application of materials from one situation of learning to another one.

After setting the scene of involving learners in classroom speaking, writing and discussion activities, teachers may attempt to recognize circumstances out of the class, where learners can exhibit a certain extent of autonomy. Upon the basis, learners' needs may be given spaced and supported the whole class by letting them know what they can learn from the class and use outside it. The standpoint of ecology shows that the situation of learning is all inclusive, and everywhere is learning chances. Learners widening chances of learning through using lexicography, internet, negotiating with others, collaborating activities, discussing the possibility of materials for learning.

5. Conclusion

Using the world as a point of comparison to establish the learning environment for any level of learners is the ultimate goal of this paper. By identifying the predisposition and creating an ecology of learning, autonomy of learning can be ensured. When the notion of ecology is utilized in learning, it becomes very crystal clear that learning is a cyclical process rather than a straight

one. Hence, ecology introduces us with the variety of elements like social, material or discursive characteristics of the situation.

Though the approach of ecology multifaceted of instruments, diverse population and heterogeneous notion can be part of learning. For instance, a learner of one language who finds it difficult to get the meaning of another language, may ask for support from the learner of that language and engaging themselves in one activity they share their lived-experience. If any unanticipated element is found, researcher and educators can help teachers how to use them after modifying them. Even for multilingual communities and bilingual families, how community literacy can be developed through reading stories and telling stories, can be suggested by schools. For teacher development a good number of materials from the society can be utilized.

The view of ecology points out the mutual dependence of the materials as well as students. It clarifies that investigation and teaching go hand in hand to give us a glimpse of holistic approach. Learner is existing within a circumstance; so, everyone should concentrate on how learner is guided by the situation, how he is affected by his insight of the situation. At the same time how the situation as a complete one reforms the individuals and the communities, should be considered. A person of a context can be a resource of the other context.

Mike Vermeeren (2022) argues that in the situation of ecology learners may attempt purposeful action of negotiating with the materials to reach the goal. Among many factors, the pivotal one of becoming autonomous is to be conscious of and able to create advantageous utilization materials, that can come up with learning crucial things like understanding, rehearse, identification on meaning, feedback on progress. Finally, the transformation of our knowledge on autonomy is from a highlight on the single person being liberated from the situation to the larger perspective of individual's action within the situation as well as to the complete scenario of classroom environment, family, class, community, society where learning may take place.

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