

Autonomous Language Learning Behaviour: The Role of Instructional Mediation in Vocabulary Development

Naginder Kaur

Academy of Language Studies, Universiti Teknologi MARA Perlis, 02600 Arau, Perlis, Malaysia

ABSTRACT

Autonomous learning behaviour is the avenue to improvement in language ability. In the scope of vocabulary, autonomous learning enables efficient learning, which in turn improves students' ability in the four language skills, namely, listening, speaking, reading and writing. This study was undertaken with the aim of probing how teaching practices affect autonomous learning behaviour in vocabulary development. A case study on 34 students engaged in an English proficiency class at an institution of higher learning was carried out. Data were collected through four rounds of weekly interviews as well as daily journal entries for one month by the students and their lecturer. It was found that the instructor is a crucial mediating variable in encouraging autonomous learning behaviour. Some of the practices which impact students positively are providing the right pedagogical context, teaching according to students' needs and interest and providing adequate assistance in materials used in class. When teacher is able to set the right learning climate, positive states and mental readiness in learning are witnessed, which are requisites to autonomous learning behaviour. However, it is also important for the instructor not to overburden students with too many words in one lesson. For the students, it is necessary to reduce dependence on the instructor and take greater charge in the learning process to become autonomous language learners.

Keywords: Autonomy, Instructor, autonomous learning behaviour, lexical items, vocabulary

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received: 7 July 2013

Accepted: 2 October 2013

E-mail addresses:

naginder.kaur@gmail.com (Naginder Kaur)

INTRODUCTION

Learner autonomy is seen as the hallmark to effective language learning and improved language ability, as confirmed by various empirical studies (Guo & Zhang, n.d.; Sidhu, Sarjit & Chan, 2011). Students who demonstrate autonomous behaviour share

common characteristics and responsibilities as outlined by Kelly (2003):

- Students work alone or with others using a wide variety of learning materials and resources; the learning skills involved in planning what, when and how to learn.
- Students decide what they want to learn and how they will learn it.
- The responsibilities lie with the individual learner in managing his or her own development. It is important to choose and use materials and support resources appropriately and effectively.
- It involves coaching, guiding and assisting individuals in using learning resources and materials to their best effect.

In response to the fourth responsibility listed above, establishing autonomous behaviour among students, albeit being an independent trait, is a reciprocal process between the teacher and the learner as autonomous learning does not equate teacherless learning (Guo & Zhang, n.d.; Thanasoulas, 2002). The complementary teacher-learner role does not render the teacher redundant nor does the teacher lose control over what transpires in the learning process (Thanasoulas, 2002). In language learning in general and vocabulary learning in particular, autonomous learning behaviour can develop in a teacher-led class (Nation, 2001) because the aim of others directing us is often to allow us to direct ourselves (Roberts, 2006).

Nation (2001) further stresses that autonomy is experienced as long as the

learner wields empowerment and explores what should be given the greatest amount of attention and effort, what should be looked at again and reviewed outside class, how the material presented should be mentally processed and how interaction with the teacher and others in the class should be carried out. In the learner's bid to make these important learning decisions, the complementary and supportive role of the teacher is crucial and invariable.

In this regard, autonomy could be seen in the metaphoric sense where the teacher provides the "oar" for the learner to "steer his or her boat" in the right direction.

THE STUDY

In developing empowerment and autonomy in vocabulary learning among students, the teacher is frequently faced with insurmountable challenges and blocks in his / her quest to reach that end owing to several factors. First, vocabulary is often an unfavoured teaching and learning activity as more often than not, students are expected to pick-up vocabulary on their own, with little or no guidance (Crookall & Oxford, 1990, cited in Tong, 2000). Thus, students are left with "serious deficit for any kind of real use of the language they are learning" (Twaddell, 1972, cited in Zakaria, 2005, p. 4). This predicament is also the result of students' initial perception of English being a difficult language, limited exposure to the language and teachers' failure to use interesting teaching and learning processes in class (Low, 2004, cited in Zakaria, 2005). Secondly, students prefer the teacher to take

the central role and decide what should be learnt or otherwise (Naginder & Abdullah, 2007). In relation to vocabulary learning, the pertinent question is: “What vocabulary do the students need to know?” (Nation, 1990). In addressing this, “teachers need to prioritise words that students need to know and how this can be learned meaningfully” (Hassan, 2001, p. 118-119). Knezovich, Tierney, & Wright’s (1999) study on 5th and 6th graders found the majority of teachers to prefer teacher selected vocabulary over student selected vocabulary. The question that needs answers is, do they know how to? Teaching vocabulary from isolated lists of words (explicit learning) can be counterproductive because students fail to draw connections between these words to their personal word use and their own reading (Ianacone, 1993, cited in Knezovich, *et al.*, 1999) and it is probable that students will rapidly forget words on these lists, as Anderson and Nagy (1993) explain:

Vocabulary instruction that promotes word consciousness, a sense of curiosity about word meaning, appreciation of nuances, independence in word analysis, and wide regular reading appears to be superior to conventional instruction. (p. 1)

Thus, it is important that teachers play a role in facilitating vocabulary acquisition and enhancing autonomous learning behaviour among students. We can see these connections in several studies which show that the teacher is an important stimulus

as well as a provider of reinforcement who determines whether there is positive response (Ismail, 2004; Naginder, 2005) or negative response from the students (Hussin, Maarof & D’Cruz, 2000; Naginder & Osman, 2004).

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

Consequently, this study was undertaken to probe observable practices among teachers which support and encourage autonomous learning behaviour among students. The objectives of the study were as follows:

1. to enquire the positive classroom practices of teachers which help to encourage autonomous learning behavior. These practices include aspects of what they do, how they do, when they do and why they do (demonstrate) these positive or negative practices (traits).
2. to probe students’ response and perceptions of their teacher’s observable practices in class.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

With the above research objectives in perspective, the following research questions were derived:

1. How can instructors encourage autonomous learning behaviour among the students in the learning of vocabulary items?
2. How do the students perceive the instructor’s efforts in encouraging autonomous learning behaviour among the students?

Theoretical Perspective of Instructional Mediation in Vocabulary Learning

The role of the teacher in encouraging autonomous behaviour can be described by the Socio Cognitive Theory which focuses on two distinctive types of learning - enactive learning and vicarious learning. Enactive learning relates to the learning experience derived by doing and experiencing the consequences of one's own actions. The consequences are interpreted to provide information about expectations and influence one's motivation and beliefs. Enactive learning is inherent in approaches of self-directed and learner-centred learning like experiential learning and problem-based learning. On the other hand, vicarious learning is learning through observation. By observing others, students focus their attention, construct images, remember, analyse and make decisions that affect learning. Thus, observation and consequences are two important notions and pillars of this theory.

Bandura (1986) explains that observational learning in the Social Cognitive Theory is based on four important elements. These are paying attention, retaining information or impressions, producing behaviour and being motivated. Firstly, students need to pay attention in the learning process during teacher modeling (see Lee & Muncie, 2006). That means in vocabulary learning, they need to acquire the need to want to learn, that is, possess the attitude towards learning. Next, retention occurs by creating mental images of the modeled practice to remember

the elements of steps involved. The third element, production ensures learning through repeated actions and practice as well as through feedback. Finally, the last element is motivation and reinforcement. The reinforcement to stimulate learning may be from the teacher, either directly or indirectly (vicarious reinforcement) or may be self-reinforcement of being able to value and enjoy one's personal growing competence. All these forms of reinforcements lead to positive learning behaviour and function exclusively as well as integratively, through both elements of learning consequences and observational learning, in turn enhance and establish learner autonomy in vocabulary learning. Autonomous learning is "able to arouse students' interest and learning initiative, improves students' learning effectiveness and develops students' autonomous learning capacity compared with the traditional teaching model" (Guo & Zhang, n.d., p. 6). In a teacher-fronted class, students can become autonomous by seeking help in setting realistic goals to accomplish within a specified time. Setting clear, challenging and realistic goals can help students see their own vocabulary learning progress. With awareness, attitude towards learning improves. Based on the approaches of enactive learning and vicarious learning as postulated by the Socio Cognitive Theory, the model below is derived to show how instructional mediation of these two approaches to learning can support and encourage autonomous learning behavior.

SCOPE AND METHODOLOGY

The qualitative study was carried out on a group of 34 English language students and their lecturer, engaged in the teaching and learning of vocabulary items at an institution of higher learning in Malaysia. The students were enrolled in a weekly six-contact-hour course with weightage of three credit hours. It is primarily a skills-based language proficiency course which stipulates that students be given the opportunity to practise and integrate language skills in meaningful tasks relevant to academic contexts. In addition, the course intends to prepare students with skills and strategies for the Malaysian University English Test (MUET). In narrowing down on autonomous learning behaviour, the lecturer needed to alleviate the students' lagging lexical ability (see Mathai, Jamian & Nair, 2004; Syed Aziz Baftim, 2005; Tengku Sharif, Mohamad Noor & Yunus, 2008; Othman, 2009) as it was deemed important to raise students' lexical competence to enable them to relate to the four language skills tested in the MUET.

The lecturer selected for this study was a female. With vast teaching experience of over 20 years, she was the preferred choice as she had a wide repertoire of teaching skills with high professionalism. It was deemed important to explore learner autonomy in a competent teacher-led class, so the teacher factor would not be cited as the cause, in case of disinterestedness or boredom among students.

The data were collected through non-contrived and unobtrusive means. The lecturer's practices which supported autonomous learning behaviour were recorded for a period of four weeks through weekly reflective interviews with randomly selected students, weekly reflective interviews with the lecturer as well as daily journal jottings of the students and the lecturer. The lecturer provided data on participants' behaviour and of her reflections before, during and after the lessons. Her insights were of high value as she was able to provide feedback in order to understand the situations at hand. The researcher also perused the lecturer's teaching portfolio to

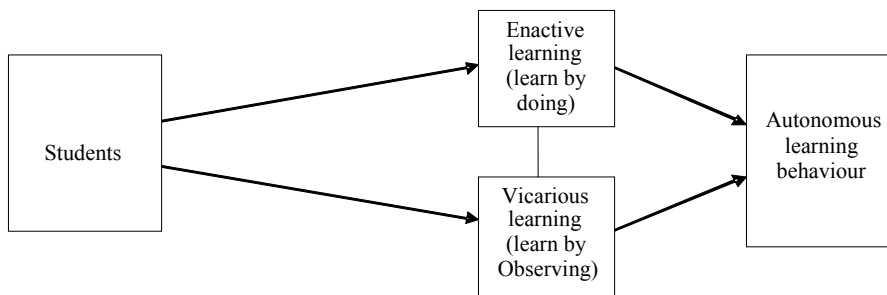


Fig.1: Instructional Mediation for Autonomous Learning Behaviour in the Socio Cognitive Theory

explore the philosophy underpinning her teaching.

The lecturer taught vocabulary through both explicit and implicit methods. According to her, lessons were planned to allow room for expressing views and sharing opinions. Topics ranged from teenage curfew, the Internet, motivational stories and social issues. Since the course syllabus and course outline do not specifically stipulate the learning of vocabulary, it is assumed that instructors use own initiative and creativity in devising language activities that develop and reinforce the learning and retention of vocabulary items. As stated earlier, vocabulary is often regarded as peripheral in the development of language skills and is incidentally covered here and there, in the order in which it appears in the materials used. Hence, pedagogical decisions taken in encouraging autonomous behaviour in the learning of vocabulary are crucial.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings to Research Question 1 and Research Question 2 are presented and discussed simultaneously. The lecturer's practices that encouraged autonomous behavior (or otherwise) and the students' reactions are discussed in tandem. Seven traits exhibited by the lecturer were reported by the students, and these were confirmed by triangulating students' data with the teachers' lesson plans, reflective interviews and teaching portfolio. Hence, the practices and students' reactions to these practices are presented and discussed in totality, as they are not seen in mutual exclusivity.

Providing the Right Pedagogical Context

The students in this study cited their favourite language learning experience to be the time when the lecturer played an effective role in their learning process. The students found vocabulary items easy and enjoyable to learn in the semester owing to the instrumental role played by the lecturer who provided varied examples and illustrations. Establishing the right pedagogical context enhanced the students' affective states (which are requisite to autonomous behaviour) as related in their interviews and journals. When affective states were positive, students were encouraged to accept and embrace learning in a meaningful way through testimonies below:

Sometimes she need to different lesson ... not the stereotype like before this lecturer ... quite boring class but this sem, something is different - the way she taught us.
(Student A)

Sometimes, poor concentration can be avoid if the lecture is not boring when she want to teach. The way lecturer give a lesson can overcomes of lack of concentration. But my lecturer just know is very good to overcomes her students poor concentration. She is the best English lecturer. (Student A)

Lecturer or teacher plays the roles to the student on how, what, when, where, how to improve, gain, add

the vocabulary item, these also depend to the lecturer on how they teach the student in the classroom. (Student B)

My lecturer helps me a lot ... She trying to make us know what she is deliver for us. She explain one by one clearly. (Student C)

In accordance with the Socio Cognitive Theory, from the findings, we can see that the key to vocabulary acquisition is a mediation of meaning and the teacher assumes an important role in mediating such acquisition by making lessons non-arduous and by alleviating students' boredom in learning. As postulated by Giridharan and Conlan (2003), teachers need to use methodologies and techniques that help to focus the attention of students to improve their vocabulary autonomously, and the lecturer in this study was able to do just that.

Demonstrating Positive Personality Traits

The lecturer's positive personality traits also impacted students' positive learning behaviour. For example, Student D said she could "understand the lesson even though that have a little bit words that I don't understand the meaning" due to "[my] nice lecturer." Another affirmative comment by Student D showing the lecturer's patience was that she "will correct the answer from the words that we make." Thus, students demonstrated positive behaviour. This was also confirmed by Student A because:

"When I am in the class, I become more elated and curious about the lesson. The lecturer does not give the lesson only, but she give the motivation including about studies but also about life."

Artistry in teacher's enterprise is demonstrated through interrelated learner-centred approaches such as developing positive relationships and respect for students, good instructional organisation, classroom management and user-friendly instructions. The teacher's artistry (in the form of stimulus and / reinforcement) is true measure of effectiveness in achieving the desired instructional outcomes of creating autonomous learning behaviour.

Providing Instructional Activities to Suit Student Preferences

The students in this study generally said that their most preferred mode of learning was via listening (particularly songs) and speaking activities. They experienced positive affective states when lessons incorporating vocabulary suited them, namely, activities involving interaction in socially significant tasks of collaborative work and oral communication (such as role play, drama, group presentations) as these activities gave them the much needed opportunities to activate language use and reinforce vocabulary items. Thus, they demonstrated autonomy by being more engaged as the language skills suited their preference. With positive affective states, students also demonstrated mental readiness

for instructional input, consequently, setting the right platform for word acquisition. In addition, active learning platforms also gave the students the opportunity to elaborate on existing knowledge through interactions and discussions.

According to the class lecturer, speaking activities conducted during the semester included role plays, group discussions and individual presentations, all of which were well appreciated by the class. An example of this appreciation is evident through the comment by Student G: "Role play can release my tension ... the best moment is where I can speak up spontaneous and play my role well." When lessons related to the students' needs and interests, lexical items were perceived to be easier and manageable (enhanced cognitive state) as well as fun and enjoyable (improved affective state). Findings obtained by Laufer and Hulstijn (2001), who proposed the construct task-induced involvement showed that a learner's need (how strongly the learner wants to achieve a certain task) determines the extent of words he or she would learn in the task. Task-induced involvement thus, corroborates with students' motivation, which in turn determines their attitudes towards the tasks at hand.

In further developing learner autonomy through active learning, several suggestions and comments made by the students were pertinent. For example, a few students postulated the use of interactive games to make vocabulary learning fun, such as scrabble, quizzes and crossword puzzles, as well as fun tests because language

games bring a lot of life and interest into the classroom (Vasudhara & Katyayani, 2008, cited in Babu, 2010). There were also suggestions for English Week or vocabulary campaign, group discussions, drama, role play, public speaking and debates. Meanwhile, Student E suggested story telling by the lecturer since it is "entertaining and effective because when we learn new words, automatically we will remember the related stories." This directly corresponds to cognitive psychology that holds learning as a process where new cognitive structures are formed, combined, altered or extended.

In contrast, when lessons did not suit their preference, attitude towards vocabulary learning was affected. The students revealed that the lecturers in the previous semesters had not engaged them in adequate and meaningful speaking activities as well as collaborative tasks to enhance their vocabulary. In fact, they claimed that they had never been exposed to role plays before - a finding congruent with other studies (locally and abroad) showing lack of collaborative and speaking-related tasks for learning in social setting (see Naginder, 2004; Osman, 2005; Zarafshan, 2002, cited in Hamzah, Kafipour, & Abdullah, 2009). Therefore, students had found English classes of the previous semesters to be boring and of "the same thing" all the time.

Providing Handouts with Textual Glosses

Although it was sometimes a little difficult to learn lexical items, the students said that handouts with glosses (written meanings

of difficult vocabulary items) made learning easier. The researcher's perusal of the handouts used showed that every handout had an appended vocabulary list / glossary. Dictionary meanings in English (taken from the "Compact Oxford English Dictionary" and "Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English") were provided. Parts of speech as well as contextual use (with several examples) were also given in the handouts. Providing the meanings of difficult vocabulary items made the encoding process easier with the lecturer's effort of providing input in the handouts. Student E explained that, "She likes to discuss about words that are quite difficult, and then she likes to give the meaning, also she gives handouts about the meanings. Every handout will include the meaning." The students said that "this will become easy for students to help them to refer the word if [we] do not understand" (Student A) and "this will encourage students to read and learn new words" (Student E) because the use of glosses makes students more autonomous in a reading activity (Nation, 2001).

Even though some of the listening texts were found to be challenging, the students unanimously agreed that glosses of difficult lexis found in the listening tape scripts made listening exercises more manageable. Similarly, in dealing with literary texts such as poems, Student F relayed in her journal: "Today, I more understand about that poem and I think I will easy to understand future poem if I get the new poem."

The lecturer also went a step further and drew associations with the Depth of Information Processing (DOP) model (Craik and Lockhart, 1972, cited in Folse, 2006) which states that the greater the semantic involvement or word analysis, the more persistent and lasting the students' memory trace would be. The lecturer led discussions and provided the platform for students to explore the DOP model - examples were provided in the handouts as well as on the whiteboard, meanings were outlined in detail on the overhead projector, many of the vocabulary items were discussed with further examples (to supplement the illustration in the handout) and graphic representations of the vocabulary items were also made. For example, when explaining "vice cycles", the lecturer drew a wheel on the white board, while the proverb "to turn over a new leaf" was also accompanied with vivid graphic representation.

The lecturer's initiative of providing the meaning of a few difficult or relevant vocabulary items on each handout(s) also dispelled frustration of having to deal with too many unknown lexical items and resulted in positive affective states. "I will become more interested because the learning material is provide the difficult words together with the meaning" (Student A). In fact, all the students in the class appreciated the lecturer's initiative of going through every sentence in the article of a particular handout, and described her to be "very understand what the student needs." This effort was lauded either during the interviews or in the students' journal entries.

Synonyms, Proverbs and Interesting Subject Matter

A useful lexical teaching strategy which helped autonomous learning by evoking positive affective states was the teaching of synonyms to reinforce vocabulary use, particularly in writing. The students said that previously, they frequently used the same or familiar and common words all the time, but the learning of useful synonyms like “improve” and “enhance”, as well as a variety of discourse markers stimulated their interest in lexis, to be able to convey meaning in the most effective way possible.

The students also expressed appreciation for being able to learn various types of vocabulary which conveyed implicit meanings. One of these forms was the learning of proverbs because “proverbs show the beauty in a language” (Student G). In fact, some reminisced that they were learning these proverbs for the first time (such as “to turn over a new leaf”) after having spent two full semesters at the institution. Besides proverbs, students also learnt limericks, such as, “we are paid best for the things we do for nothing.” In addition, several idiomatic expressions were effectively learnt such as, “never let a fool kiss you, and never let a kiss fool you”, “treat everyone with politeness, even those who are rude to you, not because they are kind, but because you are”, “Take a lesson from the mosquito. She never waits for an opening - she makes one” and “only your real friends tell you when your face is dirty.”

Interesting subject matter pertinent to students’ lives like teenage issues made the

learning of some lexical items non-arduous, such as the word, “rebel” and “rebellious”; The students, being in their teenage years found these lexical items to bear relevance to their lives and experiences. When the subject matter was of interest to them, learning was facilitated due to increased motivation, for example, Student E related in her journal, “Although it is a common article, I found it interesting because after reading it, I have an intention to keep a vocabulary journal.” This is evidence of how autonomous learning behavior takes off as a result of interesting subject matter.

Another source of affinity for learning lexical items was the teaching and learning material sourced from the Internet and about the Internet. As the present day students belong to the Net Generation (Pletka, 2007), they showed much enthusiasm when the teaching points used the multimedia or dwelled on the Net and its attributes. The lecturer said that the Internet sources for learning “got them thinking harder”, for example, when doing the reading comprehension on “Bane or Wonder - Internet is Here to Stay.” The novelty of the words did have an impact in sustaining their interest in lexical learning, hence provided points of take off for autonomous learning.

Importance of Optimum Input for Positive Affective States

The amount of input was found to be an important indicator of students’ affective states. Despite the many positive attributes of the lecturer in facilitating vocabulary acquisition and autonomous behaviour, it

was found that the lecturer was not always consistent in the number of new words introduced in class. Most students contended that too many unfamiliar words in a day caused confusion and even frustration, in some cases. For example, Student H pointed out, “*Macam slow-slow tu, bolehlah, kalau bagi sikit-sikit ok lah. Tak boleh bagi banyak-banyak lah - tak boleh ikut lah ...*” (Translation: if we are taught slowly and a few words are presented at a time, it is ok ... we cannot be introduced to too many words - we are unable to cope). For example, when the lecturer introduced more words than he could manage in a particular lesson, Student I commented, “I feel that those words are too difficult and not familiar.” On another day, he pointed out, “I couldn’t learn it because my lecturer give me too many words to be remembered. I never heard these words before and this make me difficult to memorise.” In week four, he confessed to have been able to learn the vocabulary items because “this day, lecturer do not focus too much words.”

An individual is able to process or hold only five to nine chunks of information at a time, that is, seven plus or minus two (Miller, 1956). Lehr, Osborn, Hiebert (n.d.) contend that it is possible to teach about eight to ten words effectively each week. In this study, opinions on the number of vocabulary items or input that should be taught and learnt in a day varied among the students. Although they insisted on not too many words in a day, there was no clear determinant or consensus of their individual preference for the number of words to be

learnt in a day or week. For some, “... not many new words in a day, only one or two” (Student J) while for others, “not more than five ... because ... the lecturer should understand that we cannot accept too much new words per day” (Student I). On the whole, the students proposed to limit lexical input to a maximum of five words per lesson. For weekly input, it was noted that five words a week would be the optimum number to learn for some while others said they might be able to handle up to ten words a week. Students’ assertion of limiting instructional input is important pedagogical consideration as overload imposes a mental block for students when they are unable to process too much information at one time, particularly when their mental storage capacity is filled up. Likewise, when there is too little input, there will be wastage in the mental space within the learner as learning is not optimised.

Corresponding to the Comprehensible Input Hypothesis, students learn best when the information presented is just a little more complex than his or her current level and arouses curiosity in learning. The Comprehensible Input Hypothesis is one of the five L2 (second language) learning hypotheses proposed by Krashen (1985). According to this hypothesis, language comprehension and acquisition occur when there is presence of optimum levels of comprehensible input. The optimum level relates to input which is just a little beyond the learner’s current level of understanding and comprehension of the target language (Krashen, 1985). This means that the learner

will not acquire any type or amounts of input presented but will comprehend only what is a little beyond the learner's level of cognition ($i + 1$). In relation to this study, learning occurred when the students felt curious about the vocabulary items and felt stimulated or positively challenged to cope with material that were a little beyond their current level of comprehension. When there was optimal challenge, students were able to handle tasks and found the learning process intriguing.

Over-dependence on Lecturer

In mediating the learning of vocabulary items, and striving to encourage autonomous learning behaviour among students, it was found that the students frequently preferred the lecturer to make major decisions pertaining to teaching and learning. Although they expressed preference for more speaking and group activities, nevertheless decisions on the scope of input or topic and instructional approaches were often left on the lecturer's shoulders. The students themselves shunned heavier responsibility in the learning process, confirming many previous research findings in the Malaysian context (Thang, 2001, 2003, 2005, cited in Thang & Alias, 2007; Thang & Alias, 2007; Thang, 2009). These studies show Malaysian tertiary students' lack of autonomous learning initiatives at various (public and private) institutions and indicate that majority of students are teacher-centred, if not fully teacher-dependent, that is, they favour the traditional role of the teacher as a knowledge transmitter, guide and motivator.

The lecturer was of the opinion that majority of her students were not fully independent students of vocabulary. English was taught as a second language but most of the time, it was only used in the classroom and six hours of weekly instructions were inadequate to fully inculcate values of autonomous behaviour.

CONCLUSION

The study found that in encouraging autonomous learning behaviour, the instructor's role is not only pivotal but indispensable. As a major social source of learning, the lecturer in this study was able to provide the scaffold to support the learning of lexical items through practices of providing clues, reminders, encouragement, breaking the problem down into steps, giving examples and other measures which would foster autonomous learning behaviour. The instructor's pedagogical decisions and degree of commitment were found to be paramount and determined the extent of preference for vocabulary learning and successful word acquisition. Hence, a non-judgmental and warm social setting must be established to intensify learning and facilitate autonomous learning behaviour.

The affective stance was relatively high among the students owing to the setting of a supportive learning environment and right pedagogical approaches which took into account students' interest and their preferred methods of reinforcing lexical knowledge. Lecturers who employ appealing teaching methods are viewed as friendly and amicable, and as a result,

students feel more at ease. The lecturer's strategy of providing the meaning of difficult lexis also helped reduce anxiety levels and was much appreciated hence, bringing about more positive attitudes towards lexical learning.

On the other hand, the study also showed that fallacy of teaching methods which failed to evoke students' interest leads to the lack of motivation and low affective states in self-improvement. This was noted through students' learning experiences in the previous semesters.

The findings indicate that it is necessary for the lecturer to ensure that excessive information or scarcity of it, does not occur, or it would result in either blocked mental capacity or slow mental processes, without any meaningful lexical acquisition. The amount of input in a lesson is a key consideration which ensures optimal learning.

The findings proved that a blend of positive traits and pedagogical practices do encourage autonomous behaviors and good teachers beget good students. However, it must be iterated that if students wish to make huge strides and leaps in learning, they need to make extra effort and work much harder. Over-dependence on the instructor must be controlled and students need to become equal partners in the teaching and learning process by participating in decisions related to profitable learning.

In future, this study could be replicated in other settings of lexical learning, with greater sample data in order to derive a benchmark of teaching practices in the learning of lexical items. Sample could

be drawn from various cultural and socio-economic backgrounds of both teachers and students, so as to provide a representative sample of the Malaysian student population, in general. This would consequently serve in exploring and demonstrating how teachers of different backgrounds and values implicate autonomous behaviour among students.

REFERENCES

- Anderson, R. C., & Nagy, W. E. (1993). *The vocabulary conundrum*. (Report No. G0087-C1001-90). Urbans, IL: Center for the Study of Reading. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 354489).
- Babu, A. R. (2010). Plain levels of strategy in vocabulary studies, *ELT Weekly* 54, Retrieved February 28, 2011 from <http://www.elweekly.com/elt-newsletter/2010/03/54-research-paper-plain-levels-of-strategy-in-vocabulary-studies-by-a-ramesh-babu/>.
- Bandura, A. (1986). *Social foundations of thought and action*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.
- Giridharan, B., & Conlan, C. (2003). *L2 vocabulary acquisition: Investigating the key to lexical comprehension*. Retrieved January 17, 2010 from <http://surveys.canterbury.ac.nz/herdsa03/pdfsnon/N1068.pdf>.
- Guo, N., & Zhang, Y. (n.d.). *An empirical investigation of learner autonomy in some EFL classes in China*. Retrieved February 26, 2011 from Australian Association in Research for Education, <http://www.aare.edu.au/04pap/nai04930.pdf>.
- Folse, K. S. (2006). The effect of type of written exercise on L2 vocabulary retention. *TESOL Quarterly*, 40(2), 273-293.
- Hamzah, M. S. G., Kafipour, R., & Abdullah, S. K. (2009). Vocabulary learning strategies of Iranian undergraduate EFL students and its relation to

- their vocabulary size. *European Journal of Social Sciences*, 11(1), 39-50.
- Hassan, F. (2001). Developing competent readers. In M. E. Vethamani (Series Ed.) & M. K. David & F. Hashim (Vol. Eds.), *Developing reading skills* (pp. 107-139). Petaling Jaya: Sasbadi Sdn. Bhd.
- Hussin, S., Maarof, N., & D'Cruz, J. V. (2000, May). *Sustaining an interest in learning English and increasing the motivation to learn English: An enrichment programme*. Paper presented at MICELT 2000 Conference, Melaka, Malaysia.
- Ismail, N. (2004). What is the colour of your story?: Motivating students to read. In J. Mukundan, D. Zainal Abidin, & A. Aziz Hussin (Eds.), *ELT matters 1: Issues in English language learning and teaching* (pp. 127-136). Universiti Putra Malaysia Press: Serdang, Malaysia.
- Laufer, B., & Hulstijn, J. (2001). Incidental vocabulary acquisition in a second language: The construct of task-induced involvement. *Applied Linguistics*, 22, 1-26.
- Lehr, F., Osborn, J., & Hiebert, E. H. (n.d.). *A focus on vocabulary*. (Online) Retrieved July 10, 2010 from http://www.prel.org/products/re_/ES0419.htm.
- Kelly, G. (2003). *What was different about SDL?* Retrieved January 25, 2009, from <http://www.cs.tcd.ie/Gaye.Kelly/portfolio>.
- Knezovich, I., Tierney, V., & Wright, M. (1999). *Vocabulary enrichment program for the fifth and sixth grades*. (Report No. CS 216896). Chicago, Illinois: US Department of Education. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 433550). Retrieved January 31, 2010 from http://eric.ed.gov/ERICDocs/data/ericdocs2/content_storage_01/0000000b/80/10/73/4e.pdf.
- Krashen, S. D. (1985). *The input hypothesis: Issues and implications*. Beverly Hills, CA: Laredo Publishing Company.
- Lee, S. H., & Muncie, J. (2006). From receptive to productive: Improving ESL learners' use of vocabulary in a postreading composition task. *TESOL Quarterly*, 40(2), 295-320.
- Mathai, E. J., Jamian, L. S., & Nair, S. (2004). Assessing Malaysian university students' English vocabulary knowledge. In W. Khanittanan & P. Sidwell (Eds.), *SEALSXIV: Papers from the 14th meeting of the Southeast Asian Linguistics Society (2004), Volume 1* (pp. 219-237). Canberra: Pacific Linguistics.
- Miller, G. A. (1956). The magical number seven, plus or minus two: Some limits on our capacity for processing information. *Psychological Review*, 63, 81-97. Available at <http://www.musanim.com/miller1956>.
- Naginder, K. (2004). Role play: The relationship between self-concept and learner participation in an experiential learning process, *Malaysian Journal of Learning and Instruction*, 1, 85-110.
- Naginder, K. (2005). Teacher's role in role play: A case study. In M. E. Vethamani (General Ed.) & G. Subramaniam & Shahizah Ismail Hamdan (Vol. Eds.), *Oracy in focus* (pp. 124-142). Petaling Jaya: Sasbadi Sdn. Bhd.
- Naginder, K., & Abdullah, M. K. K., (2007, July). *Autonomy in ESL: To what extent?* Paper presented at Literary Conference (LITCON) 2007, Penang, Malaysia.
- Naginder, K., & Osman, S. R. F. (2004, April). *Metaphor of authoritative teaching: Ale or ail?* Paper presented at Seminar Kontemporari Perak, Universiti Teknologi MARA Perak, Malaysia.
- Nation, I. S. P. (1990). *Teaching and learning vocabulary*. New York: Newbury House.
- Nation, I. S. P. (2001). *Learning vocabulary in another language*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

- Osman, S. R. F. (2005). Experiential learning: The effects of role-play on self-concept and communicative competence. Unpublished master's dissertation, Universiti Sains Malaysia: Pulau Pinang, Malaysia.
- Othman, N. (2009). *Measuring the vocabulary size of UUM undergraduate students*. Paper presented at 2nd International Conference ILLANS 2009. Issues in Language Teaching and Learning amongst Non-native Speakers: Language Competence and Performance: Shah Alam, Malaysia.
- Pletka, B. (2007). *Educating the Net Generation: How to engage students in the 21st century*. Santa Monica: Santa Monica Press.
- Roberts, A. (2006). *Autonomous learning: Be in control*. Retrieved December 13, 2008 from <http://www.mdx.ac.uk/WWW/STUDY/Control.htm>.
- Sidhu, G. K., Sarjit, K., & Chan, Y. F. (2011). Developing learner autonomy in the ESL classroom through the use of learning contracts, *Pertanika Journal of Social Science and Humanities*, 19(1), 217-232.
- Thanasoulas, D. (2002). *What is learner autonomy and how can it be fostered?* Retrieved December 15, 2011 from <http://www3.telus.net/linguisticsissues/learnerautonomy.html>.
- Syed Aziz Baftim, S. S. (2005). Teaching strategies to counter students' problems in MUET-based speaking exam. In M. E. Vethamani (General Ed.) & G. Subramaniam & S. I. Hamdan (Vol. Eds.), *Oracy in focus* (pp. 87-98). Petaling Jaya: Sasbadi Sdn. Bhd.
- Tengku Sharif, T. I. S., & Mohamad Noor, M. Y., & Yunus, H. (2008). Vocabulary knowledge: Students' profiling. *Voice of Academia (special edition)*, 3, 27-39.
- Thadani, R. (2010). *Information processing theory*, Retrieved January 25, 2011 from <http://www.buzzle.com/articles/information-processing-theory.html>.
- Thang, S. M., & Alias, A. (2007). Investigating readiness for autonomy: A comparison of Malaysian ESL undergraduates at three public universities. *Reflections on English Language Teaching Journal*, 6(1), 1-18. Retrieved October 10, 2010 from http://pkukmweb.ukm.my/~smthang/pdf/2007_1.pdf.
- Thang, S. M. (2009). Investigating autonomy of Malaysian ESL learners: A comparison between public and private universities. 3L: Language, Linguistics and Literature. The Southeast Asian Journal of English Language Studies, 15, 97-124. Retrieved October 10, 2010 from http://pkukmweb.ukm.my/~smthang/pdf/2009_4.pdf.
- Tong, L. (2000). Development of recognition vocabulary through contextualization: Some sample instructional materials. *Language Reporter, Millennium Issue*, 197-201.
- Zakaria, Z. (2005). *Dictionary as tool in vocabulary acquisition for rural students*. Unpublished master's dissertation, Universiti Sains Malaysia, Pulau Pinang, Malaysia.

