

Autonomous and Non-Autonomous EFL Learners' Strategies and Practices

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Abstract

The present study aimed at discovering the practices and strategies autonomous EFL learners pursue in their endeavor to master English. It thus set out in the Iranian context, with 60 EFL learners, both autonomous and non-autonomous, as participants. The gathered data through a questionnaire and an interview were subjected to content and descriptive analysis. The results showed that both autonomous and non-autonomous learners preferred to apply receptive activities rather than productive ones. However, autonomous learners practiced more productive activities such as composing emails, writing articles, chatting with native speakers and their friends, as compared with non-autonomous learners. Regarding the use of strategies, autonomous learners used more metacognitive strategies, while non-autonomous learners preferred social strategies.

Keywords: autonomous learner; non-autonomous learners, learning strategies, learning activities, EFL learners

Introduction

Since the last four decades, the concept of learner autonomy has been the center of many discussions in the language education field. As Schluchlenz (2003) indicates, the recent studies show the reality that learning mother tongue is an autonomous process in which children gradually learn to meet the communicative needs generated by its interaction with the environment (P. 26). As a matter of fact, "this unconscious autonomy" indicates the reality that human beings are born as self-directed learners who are able to take control over the learning of a language naturally. However, as Benson (2001) says as learning becomes more complex and is channeled through the institution of the school we appear to give up much of our autonomy, but because of the natural tendency to take control over different aspects of learning, all of us are able to develop autonomy. In the 21st century, the importance of helping students becoming more autonomous in their learning has become one of the most prominent themes. No more are learners viewed as passive recipients of information, but as active interpreters and processors of knowledge, which they seek based on their own interests and needs. This interest in the learner's role in the learning process has given rise to the concept of learner autonomy. From another point of view, with promoting learner autonomy as the ultimate goal of education comes the question of how to foster learner autonomy. Researchers and educators are paying more attention to autonomy possibly in order to a shift from a teacher-centered classroom in language education to a more learner-centered (Benson, 2001).

Although "interest in learners' autonomy has increased substantially in the last decade"(Godwin-Jones, 2011, p. 4), not a great deal of attention has been paid to independent learning in some contexts, Iran is case in point. As Pishghadam and Meidani (2011) argue, because of the central roles of the teachers as a dominant authority in the classrooms, learner autonomy is a challenging notion in the Asian context. Unfortunately, in Iran the language

teaching tends to turn students into the mere listener, viewer, and observant, because teachers' role is governing and students are passive recipients of knowledge in the classroom.

Autonomy is usually defined as the capability to take charge of, or be responsible for, one's own learning. Dickinson (1987) describes it as "the situation in which the learner is totally responsible for all of the decisions concerned with his learning and the implementation of those decisions. In full autonomy there is no involvement of a teacher or an institution. And the learner is also independent of specially prepared materials" (P. 11). As Morales and Holguín (2009) said the Dickinson's definition clarifies the concept of "full autonomy" in which autonomous learners don't register in an institute with no need for teacher observation. In fact, they themselves not only select the material but also establish an appropriate syllabus for their own learning. In other word, things like time, material, tasks and levels are set up by the learners themselves. Quite related to the ability of an independent learner to follow his own syllabus is the strategies and activities he find appropriate and interesting. Among many different definitions for the concept of strategy, that of Scarcella and Oxford acclaimed a broad acceptance as the most comprehensive one: "specific actions, behaviors, steps, or techniques, such as seeking out conversation partners, or giving oneself encouragement to tackle a difficult language task, used by students to enhance their own learning"(Scarcella & Oxford, 1992, p. 63). Language learning strategies (LLS) are the tools that help learners acquire a new language more effectively. Oxford (1990) classified learning strategies into six categories: memory strategies, cognitive strategies, compensation strategies, metacognitive strategies, affective strategies and social strategies. These six types of strategies were further divided into direct strategies (i.e. memory, cognitive, compensation, and indirect strategies (i.e. metacognitive, affective, social) (Oxford, 1990). Direct strategies involve those behaviors and activities related to language learning directly. Indirect strategies are those that support and manage language learning without directly involving the target language. Memory strategies enable the language learners to associate one L2 item or concept with another but do not necessarily lead to in-depth understanding. Various memory-related strategies help learners to learn and retrieve information.

By using *cognitive strategies*, learners can handle the language material in some ways through reasoning, analysis, note-taking, summarizing, synthesizing, outlining, reorganizing information to develop stronger schemas (knowledge structures), practicing in naturalistic settings, and practicing structures and sounds formally (Oxford, 2003, p. 12).

Compensatory strategies as the name suggest help the learner make up for missing knowledge.

Metacognitive strategies help a learner in distinguishing one's own learning style preferences and needs, making plan for an L2 task, collecting and systematizing materials, arranging a study space and a schedule, monitoring mistakes, and assessing task success, and assessing the success of any kind of learning strategy are used for controlling the learning process in general.

Affective strategies are fruitful in recognizing one's mood and anxiety level, talking about emotions, rewarding oneself for successful performance are examples of this type of strategy which have been shown to be considerably linked to L2 proficiency in some researches. But, in some other studies affective strategies showed a negative relationship with some measures of L2 proficiency. A possible reason for this reality is that as some students progress toward proficiency, they no longer need affective strategies as much as before. Perhaps because learners' use of other strategies including cognitive, metacognitive, and social strategies is related to greater L2 proficiency and self-efficacy, over time there might be less need for affective strategies as learner's progress to higher proficiency (Oxford, 2003, p. 12).

Social strategies help the learner not only work with others and understand the target culture but also the language. The examples of these types of strategies are asking questions to get verification, asking for making a confusing point clear, asking for help in doing a language task, talking with a partner who is native-speaker, and seeking for cultural and social norms. Social strategies were considerably related with L2 proficiency in studies by some researchers (Oxford, 2003, p. 12). However, there are different factors that can affect learners choosing strategies including: age, sex, attitude, motivation, aptitude, learning stage, task requirements, teacher expectation, learning styles, individual differences, motivation, cultural differences, beliefs about language learning, and language proficiency (Ehrman & Oxford, 1995). Strategies are the tactics learners employ to complete a task or an activity. In other words strategies are selected based on the in or out of the classroom activity the learner has to fulfill.

According to Benson (2001) research out-of-class activities are classified into three categories including: self-instruction, naturalistic language learning, and self-directed naturalistic language learning. The first one is self-instruction; in which learners perform the deliberate plans to improve their target language seek out resources to help them do this, such as reading grammar books to improve their grammar (Manfred, 2012). The second type is naturalistic language learning through which they learn more unintentionally. The example of this type is engaging in discussions in the target language. The final type is self-directed naturalistic language learning, in which learners seek out or create opportunities for learning a language, but may not directly focus on a particular aspect (e.g., grammar) while they are in that situation.

As Hyland (2004) mentioned that there are few studies about out-of-class learning and related experiences. According to Hyland (2004), Suh et al. (1999) and Brooks (1992) through similar findings reported that watching television, listening to music, going to the cinema and interacting with native speakers are main autonomous learners' activities out-of-class. He also mentioned Pickard's (1996) studies on German students who learned English in Germany. Pickard found that they preferred receptive skills (reading and listening) than productive skills. However it largely influenced by whether the activity was intrinsically interesting to them or not (Pickard (1996) cited in Hyland (2004)). Spratt et al. (2002) have studied specific activities that students engaged in outside the classroom. They found that the most frequent activities that carried out by students out-of-class are watching movies and television in English and using the internet which are examples of communication and entertainment activities.

The Present study

In the Iranian EFL context, there have been a lot of learners in different language schools, studying different books through different techniques, changing schools to have a better language learning experience, not yet achieving the desired outcome. There are some students, however, who have achieved a good dominance over English not by attending the language schools but through their own methods. They have chosen their books, their activities and learning materials by themselves. These so called a few autonomous learners can be rich sources of data to find other ways of learning a language. There has been a little delving into the nature of these autonomous learners' practices and strategies. The present study addresses this specific group of autonomous learners who, according to Dickinson's (1987) definition, are totally responsible for all of their decisions concerned with their learning and the implementation of those decisions. In fact, Dickinson (1987) defines full autonomy in which there is no involvement of a teacher or an institution (P. 11). This study was set out to investigate fully autonomous advanced learners' strategies and activities. Based on the purpose of the study, the following two research questions

were put forth.

- Q1.** What strategies do autonomous learners use in comparison with non-autonomous learners?
Q2. What are the possible practices behind autonomous learning in comparison with non-autonomous learning?

Method

Participants

The first and may be the most difficult step was to choose the participants. The participants of the present study were 60 language learners divided into two groups. There were no age and sex limits to choose the participants. The first group consisted of 30 autonomous learners who had learned English out of classroom and independently. Their ages ranged from 20 to 37 years with an average of 27. None of them had studied English language as their major in university. Seven held doctoral degrees, eight of them held master degrees and the rest held Bachelor degree from different universities. The mean years of learning language autonomously was 5.27 years. Eight of them had no classroom experience and the rest of them had such an experience with the mean of seven months, a period too short for a learner to be considered offspring of classroom instruction. Besides, none of them had attended any classrooms during the last three years. The second group was the non-autonomous one with 30 learners who had attended English Schools. Their ages ranged from 18 to 32 years with an average range of 22.16 years. In contrast with autonomous learners, there was no limitation for their majors in university. Eleven of them were freshmen in different universities and the rest held bachelor degree. They had spent an average of 5.43 years in language schools. As Mohamadpour (2013) states there is a direct relationship between language proficiency and learner autonomy. Regarding this relationship and since the degree of autonomy is usually measured through questionnaires, any attempt to divide the students into two groups of autonomous and non-autonomous using this instrument was doomed to fail. Therefore, the participants were considered autonomous in the sense that much of their language learning experience had been out of formal context and ordinary language classes. In order to ensure that the participants of this study were at the same language proficiency level (advanced level), the researcher used a sample TOEFL. Completing this phase helped researchers choose the appropriate participants.

Instrumentation

TOEFL (The Test of English as a Foreign Language): At first, in order to ensure that the participants of this study were at the same level of language proficiency, the researchers used a paper-based TOEFL adapted from TOEFL Longman. The test had 140 items including three sections. The first section was Listening Comprehension with 50 items, the second section was Structure and Written Expression with 40 items and the third part was Reading Comprehension with 50 items. Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) by Oxford (1990) was used as well to explore strategies which these learners used during the process of English learning. Inventory consisted of six parts and each part contained a number of items. Oxford's (1990) Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (version seven) used in this study was a 50-item survey. A rating scale from 1 to 5 was used as the indication of the numbers for the Likert Scale, with number one meaning 'never or almost never true of me', and number 5 standing for 'always or almost always true of me'. These categories include: 1) Memory (nine items: 1-9); 2) Cognitive (14 items: 10-23); 3) Compensation (six items: 24-29); 4) Metacognitive (nine items: 30-38); 5) Affective (six items: 39-44); and 6) Social (six items: 45-50). To answer the second

research question of the study, an interview for English learning activity adopted from Hyland (2004), with some modifications to be more suitable for the present study, was used.

Procedure

After the process of collecting the data by the means of interview and Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL), the data analysis was carried out through quantitative and qualitative analysis techniques. In order to analyze the data of the interview "content analysis" was used. To compare the strategies used by the autonomous and the non-autonomous participants z-score was used. This type of descriptive analysis included calculating standard deviation by the means of the Statistical Package for Social Sciences version 22 (SPSS, 22) and a specific formula of Z-score:

$$Z\ SCORE = \frac{\left[\frac{\sum_{i=1}^5 (n_i \times i)}{\sum n_i} \right] - (i_{max} - 1)}{SD}$$

Where (i) accounts for participants choices which can be 1, 2...5; thus, I_{max} is equal to 5. (n_i) refers to the number of participants choosing (i).

Results

To answer the first research question, Oxford's (1990) Strategy Inventory for Language Learning was used to collect information. The first part was memory strategies which included grouping, imagery, rhyming, moving physically, and reviewing in a structured way. "Using new words in the sentences" was the most popular item with autonomous learners preferring to apply it more than non-autonomous learners. "Reviewing of lessons" and "making mental picture" seemed to be the second and third popular items among autonomous learners. (Table 1).

Table 1. Memory Strategies

Memory	Autonomous learners		Non-autonomous learners	
	SD	ZS	SD	ZS
1. I think of relationships between what I already know and new things I learn in the SL.	1,033	-0.612	1,06633	-0.728
2. I use new SL words in a sentence so I can remember them.	1	0.1	1,04166	-0.128
3. I connect the sound of a new SL word and an image or picture of the word to help me remember the word	1	-1.1	1,008	-0.396
4. I remember a new SL word by making a mental picture of a situation in which the word might be used	1,088	-0.529	1,03335	-0.612
5. I use rhymes to remember new SL words.	1	-1.233	1	-0.966
6. I use flashcards to remember new SL words.	1	-0.966	1	-1.5

7. I physically act out new SL words.	1	-1.566	1	-1.4
8. I review SL lessons often.	1,0422	-0.479	1,0726	-0.404
9. I remember new SL words or phrases by remembering their location on the page, on the board, or on a street sign.	1	-1.233	1,0699	-0.436

The second part of strategies consisted of cognitive strategies in which two groups seemed to be similar. The only considerable difference is the 12th statement, "I practice the sounds of SL.", that is the most popular one among autonomous learners (Table 2).

Table 2. Cognitive Strategies

Cognitive	Autonomous learners		Non-autonomous learners	
	SD	ZS	SD	ZS
10. I say or write new SL words several times.	1,0742	-0.133	1,04	-0.416
11. I try to talk like native SL speakers.	1,099	-0.163	1	-0.033
12. I practice the sounds of SL.	1	0,066	1,0063	-0.563
13. I use the SL words I know in different ways	1.0372	-0.385	1	-0.5
14. I start conversations in the SL.	1,008	-0.529	1,0742	-0.496
15. I watch SL language TV shows spoken in SL or go to movies spoken in SL.	1,008	-0.462	1	-0.1
16. I read for pleasure in the SL.	1,0742	-0.434	1	-0.466
17. I write notes, messages, letters, or reports in the SL.	1.0662	-0.343	1	-0.3
18. I first skim an SL passage (read over the passage quickly) then go back and read carefully.	1.0726	-0.714	1,0416	-0.448
19. I look for words in my own language that are similar to new words in the SL.	1.0663	-0.906	1	-0.933
20. I try to find patterns in the SL.	1.0372	-0.578	1	-1.033
21. I find the meaning of an SL word by dividing it into parts that I understand.	1,0034	-0.597	1.0806	-0.863
22. I try not to translate word for word.	1	-0.9	1.008	-0.859

23. I make summaries of information that I hear or read in the SL.	1,0482	-0.676	1	-0.6
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The third area of strategies was Compensatory strategies which are used to be able to make up for limited knowledge, such as guessing meanings from context and using synonyms and gestures to convey meaning. The collected information showed that using synonyms and gestures to convey meaning were used mostly by autonomous learners, who stated that they used other items less frequently. Moreover, most of them didn't agree with "I read SL without looking up every new word". However, it can be inferred that non-autonomous learners do not use mentioned area of strategies very often (Table 3).

Table 3. Compensation Strategies

Compensation	Autonomous Learners		Non-autonomous learners	
	SD	ZS	SD	ZS
24. To understand unfamiliar SL words, I make guesses.	10662	-0.343	10333	-0.612
25. When I can't think of a word during a conversation in the SL, I use gestures.	1	0.033	1	-1.1
26. I make up new words if I do not know the right ones in the SL.	10063	-0.761	10482	-1.017
27. I read SL without looking up every new word.	1	-1	1	-1.566
28. I try to guess what the other person will say next in the SL.	10416	-0.512	1	-0.766
29. If I can't think of an SL word, I use a word or phrase that means the same thing.	1029	0.097	10662	-0.343

The fourth area of strategies was metacognitive which includes evaluating one's progress, planning for language tasks, consciously looking for opportunities to practice more, paying attention, and monitoring errors. The gathered data showed that autonomous learners strongly have applied metacognitive strategies during the process of learning English independently. A few of them chose "never" or "usually not" when they were answering the items of this part. "I pay attention when someone is speaking SL" and "I try to find out how to be a better learner of SL" are the most popular items among autonomous learners. In contrast, non-autonomous learners showed less interest to the metacognitive strategies (Table 4).

Table 4. Metacognitive Strategies

Metacognitive	Autonomous learners		Non-autonomous learners	
	SD	ZS	SD	ZS
30. I try to find as many ways as I can to use my SL.	1,0305	0.094	1,0283	-0.324
31. I notice my SL mistakes and use that information to help me do better.	1	0,3	1	-0.4
32. I pay attention when someone is	1,04	0,416	1,0171	·

speaking SL.				
33. I try to find out how to be a better learner of SL.	1	0.4	1	-0.133
34. I plan my schedule so I will have enough time to study SL.	1	0.26	1.0148	-0.722
35. I look for people I can talk to in SL.	1	0.06	1.0742	-0.496
36. I look for opportunities to read as much as possible in SL.	1	0.2	1.0726	-0.404
37. I have clear goals for improving my SL skills.	1.09806	0.333	1.0875	-0.275
38. I think about my progress in learning SL.	1	0.1	1.0416	-0.576

Affective strategies help the learners deal with their own emotions while learning English. Anxiety reduction, self-encouragement, and self-reward are examples of this part of strategies. This group of strategies is popular neither among autonomous learners nor among non-autonomous learners. However, there is an exception which seems to be the only popular one, i.e., "I encourage myself to speak SL even when I am afraid of making a mistake". 27 of autonomous learners stated: "it is true of me" (Table 5).

Table 5. Affective Strategies

Affective	Autonomous learners		Non-autonomous learners	
	SD	ZS	SD	ZS
39. I try to relax whenever I feel afraid of using SL.	1.0422	-0.735	1	-0.7
40. I encourage myself to speak SL even when I am afraid of making a mistake.	1.00801	0.132	1	-0.566
41. I give myself a reward or treat when I do well in SL.	1.0146	-1.445	1.0482	-1.208
42. I notice if I am tense or nervous when I am studying or using SL.	1.0171	-1.048	1.0875	-1.563
43. I write down my feelings in a language learning dairy.	1	-1.933	1	-1.166
44. I talk to someone else about how I feel when I am learning SL.	1	-1.266	1	-1.133

The last areas of strategies were social strategies which refer to how learners interact with other people in the context of learning languages and related culture. Except the first item which was used by autonomous learners more frequently, other statements seem to be the least frequently used ones. In particular, the result of number 47 showed the reality that they learned language independently and out of language classes. In comparison, non-autonomous learners used these strategies much more frequently than autonomous learners. As they learned languages in language classes with other students and teacher companionship, the result was predictable

(Table 6).

Table 6. Social Strategies

Social	Autonomous learners		Non-autonomous learners	
	SD	ZS	SD	ZS
45. If I do not understand something in SL, I ask the other person to slow down or say it again.	1.02833	0.648	1.00801	0.132
46. I ask SL speakers to correct me when I talk.	1.07265	-1.149	1	-0.3
47. I practice SL with other students.	1.00630	-2.55	1.05318	0.158
48. I ask for help from SL speakers.	1	-1.066	1.0482	-0.254
49. I ask questions in SL.	1.04221	-0.479	1.0305	-0.194
50. I try to learn about the culture of SL speakers.	1	-0.633	1	-0.5

As it can be seen, autonomous learners and non-autonomous learners respectively preferred to use:

1. Metacognitive >> compensation > cognitive > memory > social > affective
2. Social > metacognitive > cognitive > memory > compensation > affective

As was mentioned previously, interview with participants was conducted and the results shed light on their activities during the process of language learning.

The first question, "In what kinds of situations do you find that you use English rather than Persian?" was answered by both groups of autonomous and non-autonomous learners: surfing in internet, corresponding with visiting native speakers, when I watch movies /news/ listen to the music, writing and reading article, reading academic books, were the activities in which autonomous learners stated to use English more than Persian, whereas non-autonomous learners stated that they use English in the class, when they visit a foreigner and when they use computer or internet.

Table 7. Interview, Q1: autonomous learners' answers

Q1: In what kinds of situations do you find that you use English rather than Persian?

	Autonomous Learners
1. Surfing in internet	7
2. Corresponding/ visiting with native speakers	7
3. When I watch movies/ news/ listen to the music	6
4. Writing and reading article	5
5. Reading academic books	4
6. Investigation/ gathering information for research	3
7. Reading an English book	3

8. Working on technical concepts/books/presentation related with my major	3
9. Writing and sending email	2

Table 8. Interview, Q1: non-autonomous learners' answers

Q1: in what kinds of situations do you find that you use English rather than Persian?

Non-autonomous learner

1. In the class.	18
2. when I visit a foreigner	5
3. Working with computer and using internet	4
4. Practicing with my friend	3
5. in university	2
6. when I listen to news, watch movies in English and listen to the music	2

Then, they were asked to answer this question: What activities do you usually carry out in English? As it can be seen in the following charts, autonomous learners mostly read and write articles in English. Watching TV/movies in English and reading English books / text /novel/ were ranked in the second and third places. However, non-autonomous learners mostly preferred to watch movies in English. They also said to listen to music and speak with their friends and teachers in class in English. Both groups named some other activities which they usually carried out in English. Some of them are the same with difference degrees of popularity.

Table 9. Interview, Q2: autonomous learners' answers

Q2: What activities do you usually carry out in English?

Autonomous learner

1. Reading and writing articles	9
2. Watching TV/movies in English	8
3. Reading English books/ text /novel	7
4. Reading academic books	4
5. Surfing in the internet	4
6. Writing emails	4
7. Listen to the music	4
8. Memorizing new vocabularies	3
9. At work	3
10. Chatting and talking with native speaker friends	2
11. Talk with myself	1

Table 10. Interview, Q2: non-autonomous learners' answers

Q2: What activities do you usually carry out in English

Non-autonomous learner

1. Watching movies in English	9
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2. Listening to music	8
3. Speaking with my friends and teachers in class	7
4. Reading story, poem	6
5. using internet	6
6. Writing and reading articles	3
7. Listening to the news in English	2

"Which of the activities do you find most useful for improving your English?" was the third question and they similarly found watching movies and TV in English as the most useful activity to improve their English. Autonomous learners mentioned reading in English, using internet and reading and writing emails are the other useful activities. From non-autonomous learners points of view, listening to the music, writing (diary) in English, speaking and practicing with classmates and teachers in English are useful activities, too. There are some other activities of which a few are mentioned.

Table 11. Interview, Q3: autonomous learners' answers

Q3: Which activities do you find most useful for improving your English?

Autonomous learner

1. Watching movies/ TV in English	13
2. Reading English books/ newspaper/ novels	9
3. Using internet	4
4. Reading and writing email	4
5. Listening to the music	3
6. Listening to radio and news programs in English	3
7. Talking with native speakers	3
8. Talking with myself	2
9. Writing email	2
10. Using dictionary	2

Table 12. Interview, Q3: non-autonomous learners' answers

Q3: Which activities do you find most useful for improving your English?

Non-autonomous learner

1. Watching movies and news programs	15
2. Listening to the music	8
3. Writing (diary) in English	5
4. Speaking and Practicing with classmates and teachers in English	5
5. Reading books in English	4
6. Speaking with myself	4
7. Using internet	3
8. Chatting or speaking with native speakers through social networks	2

"Do you purposefully engage in any particular activities to try to improve your oral skills/ listening skills/reading skills/writing skills/vocabulary/grammar in English outside the classroom? If yes, what are they? To answer this question, both groups similarly pointed out:

"Watching movies in English" and "listening to music". Moreover, autonomous learners engaged in some activities such as reading books, listening to audio material (vocabulary and grammar) and being in contact with native speakers. Non-autonomous stated that reading books in English was the other thing that they did intentionally to improve their language. Some other activities were also mentioned.

Table 13. Interview, Q4: autonomous learners' answers

Q4: Do you purposefully engage in any particular activities to try to improve your oral skills/ listening skills/reading skills/writing skills/vocabulary/grammar in English outside the classroom? If yes, what are they?

Autonomous learner

1. Watching movies in English	8
2. Reading books and listening audio material (vocabulary & grammar)	6
3. Being in contact with native speakers	5
4. Listen to music	4
5. Writing email	2
6. Reading and writing articles	2
7. Listening to the radio/news	2

Table 14. Interview, Q4: non-autonomous learners' answers

Q4: Do you purposefully engage in any particular activities to try to improve your oral skills/ listening skills/reading skills/writing skills/vocabulary/grammar in English outside the classroom? If yes, what are they?

Non-autonomous learner

1. Watching movies in English	10
2. Read books in English	6
3. Listen to the music	4
4. Attend in talk show	3
5. Practice with my friend	2
6. Surfing internet	2
7. Read grammar/vocab books	2

As for the last question, they were asked to answer, "If a friend told you that he/she wanted to find ways to improve his/her English, what activities would you advise him/her to do? Do you do any of these activities yourself?" At the first place, autonomous learners recommended watching TV, whereas non-autonomous learners suggested registering in language classes. Autonomous learners also stated: read books, listen to audio material for learning vocabulary, read grammar books and read academic books in English. However, non-autonomous learners suggested watching movies in English and listening to music.

Table 15. Interview, Q5: Autonomous Learners' Answers

Q5: If a friend told you that he/she wanted to find ways to improve his/her English, what activities would you advise him/her to do? Do you do any

of these activities yourself?

Autonomous learner

1. Watch movies /TV shows	13
2. Read and listen books/audio material (vocabulary)	10
3. Read grammar books	9
4. Read academic books in English	6
5. Use internet in English	3
6. Talk with your friends in English	3
7. Read and write article	2
8. Listen to the radio/news in English	2
9. Use dictionaries	2

Table 16. Interview, Q5: non-autonomous learners' answers

Q5: If a friend told you that he/she wanted to find ways to improve his/her English, what activities would you advise him/her to do? Do you do any of these activities yourself? Why/ why not?

Non-autonomous learner

1. Register in an English class	14
2. Watch movies in English	10
3. Listen to the music	6

In short, autonomous learners mostly used the activities which are receptive like watching TV/movies, reading different kind of books in English, reading articles, listening to the radio/music, using internet rather than productive ones. In comparison, non-autonomous learners tried more productive activities such as writing emails, writing articles and speaking/chatting with native speakers/friends in English.

Discussion

There are different contexts of autonomy, models of autonomy and levels of autonomy which make an extensive area of autonomy and autonomous learning. However, almost no previous study has investigated the idea as conducted in the present research.

After analyzing the first research question, it was revealed that metacognitive strategies are the most popular ones among autonomous learners with a considerable difference in comparison with other strategies, and that social strategies are the most popular strategies among non-autonomous learners. Affective strategies were the least popular ones among both groups of participants. This is in line with Oxford's (2003) findings that over time there might be less need for affective strategies as learner's progress to higher proficiency (p. 12). To compare the other findings of current study, no research could be found which revealed the frequency of using strategies in autonomous learners. However, Liu (2015) who tried to explore an association between learner autonomy and strategy use concluded that "due to having the highest correlation with learner autonomy, use of cognitive strategies turned out to contribute the most to the prediction of learner autonomy, followed by use of metacognitive strategies"(p. 31). As it is obvious, the studies do not show similar findings. However, metacognitive strategies are in a high level of use in both studies. Liu (2015) also mentioned that these findings agree with "Little's (2007) interpretation that both learner reflection and learner involvement are essential for developing autonomy in language learning. According to little, learner reflection requires

learners to think critically when they plan, monitor, and self-evaluate their own learning. The strong relationship between autonomy and the use of strategies in the cognitive and metacognitive categories appeared to demonstrate the importance of learner reflection in the development of autonomy" (p. 28). As for the second research question, autonomous learners' activities were explored through using an interview. The findings can be compared with Hyland's (2004) findings which expressed "the study found that while many of the students devoted considerable time to studying and practicing English outside the classroom, much of this time was spent on more receptive activities such as listening and reading, rather than speaking. Students had a tendency to focus on private rather than public activities which did not involve face-to-face contact" (p. 180). Also, in the present study autonomous learners mostly emphasized on receptive activities such as watching T.V/movies, reading books, surfing in internet, although being in contact with native speakers can be seen in rare cases.

Conclusion

In the present study, Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) was applied to find out the frequency of language learner strategies used by autonomous and non-autonomous learners in learning English in Iran. This inventory consists of six parts: Memory, Cognitive, Compensation, Metacognitive, Affective and Social strategies. Analysis of the obtained data showed that with a great difference, metacognitive strategies were the most applicable ones among autonomous learners, whereas social strategies were mostly chosen by non-autonomous learners. Generally, it was observed that autonomous learners use language learning strategies more than non-autonomous learners. Moreover, the least popular strategies among both groups of participants were affective strategies. An interview with participants was conducted and the results shed light on their activities during the process of language learning: surfing in internet, visiting with native speakers, watch movies/ news/ listening to the music in English, writing and reading article, reading academic books were the activities in which autonomous learners used English more than Persian, whereas non-autonomous learners stated that they use English in the class, when they visit a foreigner and in the situation that they use computer or internet. Autonomous learners mostly read and wrote articles in English, while non-autonomous learners mostly preferred to watch movies in English. They similarly found watching movies and TV in English as the most useful activity to improve their English. Autonomous learners suggested watching TV in English is a good way to improve their English, whereas non-autonomous learners suggested registering in the language classes. As it can be seen, both autonomous and non-autonomous learners preferred to apply receptive activities rather than productive ones. However, autonomous learners, more than non-autonomous learners, tended to apply such productive activities as writing email, writing articles, and chatting with native speakers and their friends.

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