CHAPTER II
THEORITICAL REVIEW

A. The Definition of Learning Autonomy

The term “learning autonomy” was first introduced by Henri Holec (1981) in his book entitled “Autonomy and Foreign Language Learning”. It was defined as “the ability to take charge of one’s learning” (Al-Busaidi & Al-Maamari, 2014). Holec, cited in Borg (2012) points out students hold the responsibility for all the decision concerning all aspects in their learning such as determining the learning objectives, defining the contents, selecting learning strategies, monitoring the learning, and evaluating the achievement. In line with this, Joshi (2011) defines learning autonomy as the ability to assume responsibility for one’s own affairs - the ability to act in situation in which the student is totally responsible for all the decisions concerned with his learning and the implementation of the decisions. Nunan in Onozawa (2010) adds that students become actively involved in the management of the learning process, exercise freedom of choice in relation to learning resources and activities.

Here comes the idea that students are seen as active participants who not only acquire knowledge but also have a role in monitoring the process of acquiring the knowledge. However, the extent in which students are involved is what becomes the question. Littlewood in Benson (2006) suggests two levels of autonomy; reactive and proactive autonomy. Proactive autonomy
affirms student’s individuality and sets up directions which they themselves have partially created; meanwhile, reactive autonomy does not create its own directions, but once a direction is initiated, it enables students to organize their resources autonomously in order to reach their goal (ibid). Neupane (2010) concluded proactive autonomy is considered to be pure autonomy where the students are totally free to make individual choices. Seeing the defined proactive autonomy, it is impossible to achieve that. There is unlikely to be total autonomy for students, because formal learning contexts are never free from constraints (ibid). That is why this research is focused on the practice of reactive autonomy done by students in formal learning context.

B. Reasons for Autonomy in Language Learning

Many experts support the development of autonomy in language learning for some reasons. Learning autonomy deals with positive relation between present and future learning. Little (1995) argues that learning autonomy needs to be fostered because students who accept responsibility for their learning are more likely to achieve their learning targets; and if they do, they are more likely to maintain a positive attitude to learning in the future.

In terms of foreign language learning, Little (1999) suggested Three Fundamental Pedagogical Principles of Foreign Language Classroom. They are student empowerment, appropriate target language use and use of target language as a cognitive tool. Firstly, student empowerment means that students should be involved in planning, monitoring, reflecting and evaluating
their learning activities. Secondly, the principle of appropriate language use requires the use of target language as the main media of the communication since proficiency in a foreign language can develop only to the extent that students use whatever proficiency they have for genuine communicative purposes. His third principle, the use of target language as a cognitive tool, insists on the necessity of using the written language to elaborate learning plans, remind learners of agreed learning tasks, capture parts of the learning process, summarize individual and collective evaluations, etc, and the obvious instruments for doing this are the individual learner’s notebook, logbook or diary, or posters that are displayed on the classroom wall.

In response to the first principle, Hayta (2013) add that students should be encouraged to become critical thinkers to develop awareness about learning process and learning content. In line with this, Elizondo and Garita (2013) add that student reflection accounts for the ability built by the students to think introspectively about their strength and weaknesses so as to give an appropriate focus and twist to the next phase of learning activity. Additionally, students who are able to identify their weak areas and work to improve them are actually able to experience “learning” and the sense of improvement are important in motivating students to continue studying (Imuro and Berger, 2010). Elizondo & Garita (2013) adds that students must be taught to think in retrospection in order to evaluate and revisit what they have done, what they are doing and what they will be doing.
C. The Characteristics of Autonomous Students

While holding the responsibility of their learning and working towards them, students will show some characteristics, behavior and attempts of being autonomous. Joshi (2011) states that autonomous students hold a role in which they are described as ‘good students’, ‘responsible students’, and ‘aware students’. ‘Good students’ make decision regarding: choice of objectives; choice of content and materials; methods and techniques to be used; and how to assess progress and outcomes. ‘Responsible students’ are those who accept that their own efforts are crucial for effective learning and co-operate with the teachers monitoring own progress through the use of opportunities available. Additionally, ‘aware students’ are those who sees the relationship to what is to be learnt, how to learn and the resources available in order to take charge or control of learning. Nunan in Hayta (2013) defines awareness as making students aware of pedagogical goals and content of materials and identify their learning styles and strategies.

In line with this, Wenden (1991) in Gökgöz (2008), lists the characteristics of autonomous student as follows:

1. students have insight into their own language learning styles and preferences as well as the nature of the task itself;
2. students take an active approach to learning task, for example by selecting learning objectives for themselves and deliberately involve themselves in the target language;
3. students are willing to take risks because they accept their status as “linguistic toddlers’ or non-native speakers who are learning a new language;
4. students are good guessers because they can use clues effectively and make logical conclusions;
5. students are prepared to attend to form and to content;
6. students actively attempt to develop the target language into a separate reference system and try to think in the target language as soon as possible;
7. students have a tolerant and outgoing approach to the target language.

D. Contexts of Application of Learning Autonomy

There are two important dimensions to successful language learning: what goes on inside the classroom and what goes on outside the classroom (Richards, 2014). Learning autonomy is viewed as a way of empowering students to take responsibility for their own learning both inside and outside the classroom environment (Al Busaidi & Al Maamari, 2014). Therefore, this point discusses the context of application for autonomy under two broad headings, ‘beyond’ and ‘within’ the classroom.

1. Learning Autonomy Beyond the Classroom

Autonomous learning has the means to transcend the barriers between learning and living that have been a major preoccupation of
educational psychology, educational theory and curriculum development (Little, 1995). That is why students need to perform learning beyond the class to make links between the content of classroom learning and the world beyond (Nunan in Onozawa, 2010). In other words, students need to use the knowledge they get in the classroom and practice it in real life. Benson (2006) has proposed some modes of autonomous activities beyond the classroom, such as computer-aided language learning, out-of-class activities, self-study or self-instruction, and Joshi (2011) adds library study, group learning, and so on. Through learning activities beyond the classroom, students can learn practicing English through interaction and having extended contact with English so that they can develop aspects of linguistics, communicative, and pragmatic competence (Richards, 2014).

2. Learning Autonomy Within the Classroom

Autonomous learning in the classroom context requires students to become active in the learning process instead of being passive recipient of the taught information (Ikonen, 2013). Autonomy inside the class might involve different levels students’ control such as: management for learning, cognitive processes and learning content which can be reflected in group works, cooperative learning, innovative learning or other classroom actions and activities (Joshi, 2011).
E. Learning Autonomy and the Computer Technology

Computers and the internet are considered important in developing autonomy into students through activities which enable students to learn independently. In its development, it is not a new thing that internet and computer technology is a major source of a variety of information. Godwin-Jones (2011) points that computer technology has contributed much to the concept of autonomous learning in terms of facilitating learner autonomy through enabling a vast amount of materials for self-learning such as online resources, network services, and educational software.

Richards (2014) then emphasized that internet and computer technology can be used in a various ways, such as: online chat rooms to engage in real communication through written text-based messages or in the spoken medium; social media to develop skills needed to read authentic texts and news articles from the electronic media; digital games to develop familiarity with topics and vocabulary that may not be included in a regular language course; watching movies or TV series with captions or subtitles to support listening comprehension, vocabulary acquisition, as well as cross-cultural awareness.

F. Learning Autonomy and Motivation

Learning autonomy and motivation are two things that go together. Benson in Onozawa (2010) claims “by taking control over their learning, students develop motivational patterns that lead to more effective learning”.

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Dornyei in Onozawa (2010) even states “My personal experience is that 99 percent of language learners who want to learn a foreign language (i.e. who are really motivated) will be able to master a reasonable working knowledge of it as a minimum, regardless of their language aptitude”. This is also supported by Elizondo & Garita (2013) that Motivation nourishes learners’ inner drives, desires goals, expectations and their willingness to stand out in his struggle to get language proficiency. In addition, maintaining motivation in learning is important in language learning. Dornyei (2001) in Onozawa (2010) argues that motivation needs to be maintained and protected; otherwise the initial motivation will gradually peter out.

G. Teachers’ Roles in Autonomous Language Learning

Autonomous learning is not a learning process without teachers. It is the teachers’ task to guide the students to be autonomous. Without teacher’s counsel and supervision, however, the whole process will result in low efficiency or even fall into disorder (Yan, 2012). Neupane (2010) supports the idea that the scenario that student autonomy without teacher leads us to nowhere, for teaching process and learning process go side by side.

Generally, a teacher in autonomous language learning holds a role as a facilitator, an organizer, a resource person providing students with feedback and encouragement, and a creator of learning atmosphere and space (Joshi, 2011). Based on the three fundamental pedagogy proposed by Little,
Neupane (2010) identified some roles teachers have in autonomous language learning. A teacher should:

1. use the target language as the preferred medium of the classroom communication and require the same of her students;
2. involve her students in a nonstop quest for good learning activities, which are shared, discussed, analyzed, and evaluated with the whole class—in the target language, to begin with very simple terms;
3. help the students to set their own learning targets and choose their own learning activities subjecting them to discussion, analysis, and evaluation—again in the target language;
4. require her students to identify individual learning goals but pursue them through collaborative work in small groups;
5. require her students to keep written records of their learning—plans of lessons and projects, lists of useful vocabulary, whatever texts they themselves produce;
6. engage her students in regular evaluation of their progress as individual students and as a class in the target language.

H. Promoting Language Learning Autonomy

Autonomous learning does not come out automatically. Students are unlikely to be autonomous from the very beginning of a course unless they are given help in thinking about how they learn and how the learning can be made more effective (Harmer, 2007:396). In addition, Holec points out that
the capacity and willingness of the student to take such responsibility is not necessarily innate, and that it is something that must be encouraged and acquired by formal learning (Chan, 2001).

If autonomy is of great value in language learning, cultivating autonomy in learners will be something that every teacher would like to do (Onozawa, 2010). A systematic instruction is necessary in cultivating the ability of autonomous learning (Zhuang, 2010). The following are some ways of promoting autonomous learning suggested by Harmer (2007:397-403):

1. Thinking about learning

   Teachers can encourage students to think about what and how they have been learning by going through a checklist of ‘can do’ statements at the end of every unit. Students have to tick a list of statements such as the following:

   a. I can use present continuous to talk about the future.
   b. I can construct a business letter using appropriate language and layout.
   c. The thing(s) I enjoyed the most in last week’s lesson was/were ....
   d. The things(s) I found most difficult in last week’s lesson was/were ...

   If students do not feel they can tick a statement, they have clear indication that they should go back and study the things they still seem to have trouble with. This is very helpful for students to think about what they have learnt and start to reflect on their learning.
2. Taking over

The ideal situation is when students gradually take over their own learning. This means students start to learn something without having shown how to do it by the teacher. For example, the moment the teacher gets students to take the language for themselves. Students are no longer just repeating what the teacher has told them to; instead, they are trying to use the language to say things they want to. When the teacher assigns students to make their own dialogues with new language, they are, to some extent, taking the language into their own hands.

3. Learning journals

Journal writing provides opportunities for students to improve their writing skills, to express feelings, and especially to think both about how they are learning and also what they are learning. This may well provoke creative introspection in the writers (students); because, this provoke the writers into reflecting on how and why things happened so that they can decide what to do next. What the teacher needs to do is encouraging students to start and to keep writing journals, and of course, giving feedbacks about the journals.

4. Forcing agency

Teachers cannot force the students to be autonomous students. The idea that students come from various educational culture, learning styles
and preferences cannot be ignored. There may be some students who respond to it less enthusiastically than the others. However, teachers still can encourage those students with activities which at very least make students take part in order for the activity to be a success. For example, the Jigsaw reading activity can only be successfully completed if every student shares the knowledge they have read in their own short text.

I. Relevant Previous Studies

Joshi (2011) conducted a survey on autonomous learning activities of the Master level students, majoring in English Education, Tribhuvan University, Nepal. The respondents were 80 master level students chosen by random sampling. A quantitative data were gained by using questionnaire. There were 18 items eliciting students’ autonomous learning activities and plans. The items are rated into five point Likert scale from never to always.

It was revealed that the students made a good practice of autonomous activities with more than 80% students are found to be aware of the goals and the learning process. Students who did self-effort to improve and enhance their English were about 71%. It is also found that the students performed many autonomous activities outside the class. More than 60% students assessed themselves although they did not self-motivate much. There were 70% students who used reference materials, however, only around 30% students used computers and internet for learning English.
J. Basic Assumption

Autonomous learning provides chances for students to be more aware of their own learning. It leads students to have more attention to their own learning process. This research was aimed to investigate autonomous learning activities which have been done by students. By knowing this, teachers can select the appropriate strategy to foster autonomy and decide the area of autonomy in which students are ready to start from.