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Theses / Dissertation

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Abstract:

The shift from teacher-based classroom to student-based learning has been accelerated by the concept of learner autonomy, putting students in charge of their own learning while reducing the role of the teacher to that of a facilitator. In the Saudi Arabian context of this research, the traditional rote learning in teacher-controlled classrooms still continues, which is no longer sustainable at a time when the world is heading into a new horizon. In this respect, this study was designed to assess the readiness of the Saudi university students on a preparatory English program to partake in autonomous learning of English as a foreign language. 121 students were polled with questionnaires on their perceptions of responsibilities, abilities, motivation, and self-directed activities inside and outside the classroom for independent learning of English. The results show a discrepancy between adequate motivation level accompanied by high confidence in abilities, and, lack of voluntary learning activities coupled with reluctance to take up responsibility for own learning. This may be attributable to students' over-reliance on teachers and the spoon feeding habit. In addition to student questionnaires, 10 teachers were interviewed on their perception of where their students stand in relation to autonomous learning of English. The results of the teacher interviews indicate a cautious optimism: Teachers believe that, although learner autonomy is hard to achieve against the backdrop of a rote learning tradition; a gradual transition to learner autonomy would still be possible if administrative restrictions were removed and students were properly trained. Two main practical implications resulted from the study: necessity for learner training and the need to design a curriculum that supports learner autonomy. Due to some limitations of the study, further research is suggested to investigate the problem.

Keywords. Learner autonomy; Spoon feeding; Rote learning; Memorization vs. Retention; Learner training