Iranian EFL Teachers' and Learners' Perception of Learner Autonomy: Autonomous Activities in Focus

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Abstract:

Learner autonomy has been a recent trend in education highlighting the students' engagement in their own learning. Although over the past 30 years, a large body of research has been carried out on learner autonomy, limited attention has been paid to the sense teachers make, theoretically and practically, of this concept. Additionally, very little has been done on comparing the teachers' and learners' perception of the matter. The present study is an attempt to shed light on the general existing patterns of the way teachers and learners view the factors contributing to learner autonomy, inside and outside class autonomous activities and opportunities, the effect of autonomy on L2 improvement, the degree of feasibility and reliability of learner autonomy and comparing and contrasting their views in this regard. To do so, applying the convenience and snowballing method of sampling, a structured validated questionnaire consisting of five sections was emailed to most of the EFL teachers and their TOEFL-course students in Isfahan, Iran. Aiming at having a more precise analysis, an interview was carried out to see what reasons were behind the participants' answers. Employing the descriptive as well as inferential statistics, the results indicated that many teachers and learners viewed some factors, autonomous activities and opportunities contributing to learner autonomy more salient than others. On the other hand, the two groups believed in the highly influential effect of the learner autonomy on L2 learning. Regarding the desirability and feasibility of learner autonomy, the outcomes of the research reveal the fact that in all cases teachers and learners were more positive about the desirability of student...
involvement and their skill than they were about its feasibility. Considering the results obtained from comparing and contrasting the two groups' views showed that although teachers and learners mainly showed their agreement on the most parts, since they experience teaching and learning practically different, there were some cases about which they did not come to compromise. It was, however, revealed that the teachers emphasized a range of factors daunting due to limitations of the language centers they work in. Furthermore, learner-related factors were most widely cited by these teachers. The findings of this study might benefit those teachers, material developers and institution officials interested in enhancing learning autonomy among their students and even educating themselves or the other teachers to make use of it practically in classrooms. Key words: Lerner autonomy, autonomous language learning activities