



## **Attitudes and Approaches towards Self Access Study: an Impact on Autonomous Learning**

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### **Abstract**

*The habits and techniques students use to motivate and inspire themselves says a lot about their motivation towards learning a language. Furthermore, students attitudes and abilities play a major role in controlling and determining learning autonomy.*

*There are a number of Self-access settings and resources in which language learners can work freely. Therefore, in the light of the abundance of different services and amenities available to students how do our students utilize the different support available and what would make them observe these more in the future?*

*My rationale for this study comes from my own classroom in an attempt to investigate and explore the help students seek outside the classroom and find out more about their intrinsic and extrinsic motivation that help improve their language skills.*

*I will be looking at two different supports and how do the students perceive them. First, the institutional support in terms of facilities and extracurricular activities etc. and to what extent are these facilities utilised. The second part is the instructors, the part they play in the learning process beyond the classroom walls.*

*In this presentation I would like to establish the most common factors that affect students' motivation and what makes them want to improve their English. A study of how much help and support is available compared to what is actually used. The target is low level students who are studying English as a second language in the foundation programme as an instrumental tool for further education.*

### **Introduction**

Autonomy can also be described as a capacity to take charge of, or take responsibility for, or control. as P. Penson puts it. Helping students become more independent learners involves finding and setting up resources that would facilitate independent learning. Students still find it difficult to manage study outside the classroom and depend on the information teachers disseminate during the course of the class time. For our purpose we are looking at first year students who come fresh from the school. These students are still thinking about the way things are done at school. The transition period and trying to convince them otherwise and that there are other things they can do to learn independently usually takes a lot of time and effort. According to P. Kansanen "A great deal of our learning happens through extrinsic motivation". Many external reasons, however, may reinforce the motivation to study subjects, unpleasant or not, which the student sees useful in the future. Sometimes students see studying a foreign language is a burden and/or a hindrance for success.

### **Materials and Methods**

The study started as a need to find out the back ground information about the low results of the students in the low levels. To get a good view of the picture I tried to elicit some information from my students about the learning that takes place beyond classroom walls. Moreover, investigating the kind of help and support they reach for. The method used for this study was done in the classroom as a group discussion and interview, the purpose was to make the students more comfortable and relaxed. Therefore, they would volunteer true information and not necessarily give what others want to hear from them. There were two groups of students involved, total number around 40 students. In the first

group 23 students, 9 of them are females and the rest are males. The second group has 17 students all male. The students come from different school backgrounds from different areas of Oman. This makes an interesting diversity and variety of educational backgrounds and attitudes. There were two types of questions that were displayed on the board; the first question was in two parts: part 1. Asking about the facilities available and whether the students are aware of such services, the second part is the personal involvement in such activities if any. The second question was to do with the teachers' role as a facilitator outside the classroom. To try to understand the scope of support and help that students can get, examples of these are a library where students can borrow books and readers according to their level to worksheets and activities that help them with different language skills, such as, reading and listening. Furthermore, there are two support centres; tutorial centre and writing centre, these provide private one-to-one tuition as on different language skills such as, reading, grammar, vocabulary and writing. The tuition is voluntarily and students need to identify the area they want help in then are required to book appointments in their preferable time. In addition, there is an abundance of extracurricular activities that are educational and fun at the same time. These include speaking club, debate club, and movie watching club, movie making, radio and newspaper as well as creative art for those artistic and talented students. Finally, there are online programmes and Moodle activities that can be accessed anywhere and anytime and doesn't require the students to be on campus. Some of these activities are mandatory and assessed as part of their continuous assessment and the marks contribute towards their final grade. Other additional activities students can do at their own time and pace.

In the light of the information obtained from the students and more statistical information from the different resources, it was apparent that there is no lack of institutional resources available; on the contrary, there is plenty of resources and support within easy access. All of these provide a student centred approach to learning and encourage independent learning by giving greater control to learners in order that they are innovative, creative and capable of problem solving.

## Results and Discussion

Many Students while acknowledging that they need all the help and support they can get to improve their language, still lack the ability or skill to seek the necessary help. They postpone dealing with the problem. Out of the 40 students who participated in the discussion and group interview more than 70% of them don't use the facilities and support available to help them with their language learning. From the information given one reason is, their attitude, what I mean by this is that the students are still living in the school environment, they are used to be spoon fed by their teachers and takes them a long time to realise that they have to approach learning differently and depend more on themselves than the teacher. Another reason, is low self-confidence and giving up on trying to improve, some of them think that no matter what they do will not change anything and there is no point in trying. Though some students initially wouldn't open up but when they heard the others started to become more aware of the situation and that they were not alone. The fact that most of them have never tried to seek help whether independently or through the teacher was to me a sign of carelessness, an attitude that persists among some of them, they are unaware of the situation they might end up with. D. Thanasoulas points out that "autonomous learning is achieved when certain conditions obtain: cognitive and metacognitive strategies on the part of the learner, motivation, attitudes, and knowledge about language learning, i.e., a kind of metalanguage."

This brings us to the role of the teachers outside the classroom, in our institution the teachers dedicate 8 office hours indicated in their schedule to see their students outside the classroom. Less than 10% of the participant students use this opportunity and visit the teachers in their offices during office hours. Again attitude plays a big role in this, a large number of them forget about their learning problems as soon as they step outside the classroom walls, others prefer to do other things than see the teacher during their break time. A few of them visited the teachers and most of these only once. Finally, when asked about online and Moodle activities, the majority of them do the bare minimum and

only if it is graded. There are of course some exceptions that do more than expected of them but these are few.

## Conclusion

In trying to find out about the attitudes our low level students have in pursuing help and support to improve their language learning abilities and skills, I came across various techniques that are available to our students. There is a wealth of opportunities that are available specifically to help them gain the knowledge and skills necessary. However, a large number of them don't use these facilities but keep a low profile in trying to deal with their low proficiency level. As a consequence, their language skills takes a long time to develop. "simply removing the barriers to a persons' ability to think and behave in certain ways may not allow him or her to break away from old habits or old ways of thinking". (Candy, 1991: 124). Learning a language is a practice that needs a lot of attention, success is achieved when learners are engaged in the learning process. Even with the availability of easily accessed resources, without the positive attitude the learners jeopardise their chances of achieving their language learning goals. Similarly, their approach can say a lot about their willingness to help themselves or seek the necessary support, thus, becoming autonomous learners.

## References

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