

Learner Autonomy in EFL classes from the Eyes of Teachers

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ABSTRACT

The concept of learner autonomy has become popular since the publication of Holec (1981), who defined learner autonomy as “the ability to take charge of one’s learning” (p. 3). In fact, the related literature is abundant with descriptions of learner autonomy, suggesting that there is no commonly accepted definition of it. A considerable amount of research has been done on the subject of learner autonomy in English language teaching. While some studies have focused on the new role relationship between the learner and the teacher in autonomous learning, some others have concentrated on the issue of age of the learners. Also, there are studies on the readiness level of the teachers and/or learners for autonomy. The purpose of this qualitative study is to take a critical look at a reformist action launched by the Ministry of Education in North Cyprus in English language teaching practice at secondary and high schools. More specifically, the study intends to explore English language teachers’ perceptions of the four-year implementation of a new teaching approach initiated as a policy to promote ‘learner autonomy’ in class. To this end, 48 English teachers with different backgrounds were asked to answer a questionnaire and also interviewed in order to find out their perceptions, what kind of problems and barriers they faced in their classroom practice, and what suggestions they put forward to overcome these problems. In addition, a number of randomly selected classrooms were observed for triangulation purposes. The findings indicate that top-down reforms can be effective only when all stakeholders develop a common understanding and ownership. In addition, the readiness level of the involved people and the availability of physical facilities are important factors to consider in planning an innovative action.