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INCORPORATING CALL IN PROMOTING LEARNER AUTONOMY-A STUDY CONDUCTED IN THE REPUBLIC OF KOSOVA

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Abstract

The aim of this paper is to highlight the role of computer assisted language in promoting learner autonomy. This study was conducted in three secondary schools in the Republic of Kosova in Gjilan city. The significance of this study is to raise teachers and learners' awareness in promoting learner autonomy in their teaching and learning process. The participants of this study were 300 students and 30 English teachers. Students participated by completing the questionnaire which consisted of 27 questions and teachers gave their opinions about this topic by giving responses to 10 questions. Learners identified their beliefs and attitudes towards the use of CALL in promoting learner autonomy. Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL) appears to be very helpful in fostering learner autonomy, since it includes different useful components of autonomy. It allows learners to take control and responsibility for their own task by selecting their preferred materials, and assessing their own development. However, although it seems that the term learner autonomy is a new concept in this city the findings indicate that

participants use computers a lot for educational purposes and are positive regarding to the use of them in promoting learner autonomy. It is concluded that learners consider CALL as a great facilitator in language learning but in order to get its maximum effectiveness the findings show that learners need their teachers support. They claim that the role of the teacher is very important in guiding them to the best ways on how to use CALL in order to become autonomous learners.

Keywords

Learner Autonomy, Computer Assisted Language Learning

1. Introduction

Autonomous learning has become a popular issue in second language acquisition with the transformation from teacher-center instruction to learner-centered instruction. In order to improve this phenomenon computer technology with the great amount of sources in education is being used as a significant supporter.

In general, the term “technology represents relatively new electronic media such as computers, video, associated hardware, networks, and software that enable teachers and learners to work with them”. This is what many people think of when they consider the educational uses of technology (Mehlinger & Powers, 2002 cited in Zare-EE, 2010, p. 14). Therefore, such technology offers a great possibility for autonomous learning by facilitating the quick development in independent language learning. According to Little (2003), “autonomy requires making decision, critical reflection and social interaction”. Further on it is claimed that “a learner is autonomous when he/she is engaged in the process of learning by being responsible to set their personal goals, plan and perform tasks” (Dam, 1995; Little, 1996 cited in Lee. 2011, p 87).

2. Literature Review

Having into consideration that learning is a long term process, there are always things that need to be changed. We as learners should not always be passive and wait what the others serve to us. However, having the authority and capability of working on our own is better, rather than asking the others what to do. It is true that becoming autonomous learner is not easy,

however, in order to support this phenomenon we should always think of better solutions that can help learners become autonomous. Regarding to this issue, technology is considered as the most effective supporter.

Before coming to the solutions and supportive elements that help achieve this goal here will be mentioned some different definitions by different authors on learner autonomy and computer assisted language learning as well as its effects on this issue.

2.1 Learner Autonomy and Computer Assisted Language Learning

Learner autonomy has been the focus of interest recently. It was also linked to the technological development in education. Nowadays, there is a great interest in using computers in language learning. Therefore, it is noteworthy to mention that ‘‘technology has been connected to learner autonomy particularly when the previous is taken in the broadest sense and the later as a super-ordinate term’’ Motteram (1997) cited in Chiu (2005, p19). This means that computers especially the internet is playing a great role for the improvement of learner autonomy. With the use of different computer learning networks students become autonomous.

The role of technology in learner autonomy has been discussed over the years with the claim that it really enhances language learning. Particularly, computers have an important role in providing language students with useful language experiences while learning a new language. This means that they are no longer a tool for only finding information, but a tool for learning and teaching as well. There are lots of programs which do really help learners develop their language learning. CALL is considered to be a path to learner autonomy, which enables learners to use computers and learn individually without the help of the teacher at all. Additionally, they are considered to be successful if they build up knowledge by searching for new things on their own. Today the internet tools allow students search for limitless information. The success of being autonomous depends on the learner computer literacy and their beliefs in technology and how much they are motivated to search on it. Such technology allows teachers as well to authorize their learners, and make them capable to make decisions about their own learning and choose authentic and meaningful materials.

As mentioned above computer literacy is very important to be successful in learning autonomy. It was realized by the author Toyoda. E. (2001) who in his research findings indicates

that whether the learner becomes autonomous through the use of CALL depends on how well his/her attitudes to computers are. He further states that advanced computer literacy learners achieved the learning autonomy while using computers and were confident as well as liked the challenge to work on something that was not ready made. However, those at low level were not satisfied because of their insufficient skills in using computers and could not be autonomous.

2.2 The Role of the Teacher in Fostering Learner Autonomy

As we know the significance and the main goal in teaching is bringing changes in learners. Voller (1997) claims that, those changes can be brought only if they are determined about their roles, upon a set of decisions about any learning situations. Additionally, according to Nunan (1993) it is claimed that the role of the teachers is highly important since they should be active participants, monitors and consultants who always guide students for a better learning and help them develop their learner autonomy as well. Another researcher Ho (1995) agrees that the role of the teacher in learner autonomy is very significant since they should be responsible for students' learning. Crabbe (1993), cited in Benson, 2004) as well states that fostering autonomy is not only the matter we interact with learners but it is also important the way how we interact with them. This means that they are expected to play the roles as good guiders, psychological coordinators, facilitators, researchers too. (Xu and Xu 2014).

2.3 The Use of CALL in EFL Classrooms to Foster Autonomy

Many research findings have shown that the use of technology in EFL classrooms have shown positive results in learning a language since CALL offers additional practice. Language learners have various opportunities for developing second language skills in computer-assisted language learning environments. "CALL in EFL classrooms holds many kinds of computer technologies such as word processing, software, compact disks, authoring tools and software, e-mail, chat, discussion forums, videoconferencing, the World Wide Web ", etc. (Reima, Al-Jarf. 1995,p.5).

By using different technology, an English class becomes livelier; giving students the chance to practice their language skills in different ways. There should be considered that the mixture of the learning tracks guides to a better success in the acquisition of new language. For instance, providing students with multimedia materials makes students get involved visually. They immediately become curious to see the images shown on the monitor, and the learners will

learn more actively and more independently. This means that the learning environment will be similar to the real world if students are offered the combination of both listening and seeing. In addition, computers also help the development of speaking skills. This is achieved by listening to native speakers which has a great effect on the correction of pronunciation, which means that students can improve their pronunciation independently without the need for their teacher's help. The use of computers in EFL classroom have also psychological benefits in learning English, because students feel more confident as well as enjoy their success. Therefore, using different components of the computer's programs stimulate students' interest; increasing their motivation. This will have positive results in the development of language learning autonomy.

Moreover, not only CALL 'computer assisted language learning' is accepted as a significant mean that enhances learner autonomy, but MALL 'mobile assisted language learning' as well is very useful in language learning. Mobile assisted language learning has to do with the use of mobile technology in language learning where there is no need for learners to be stuck in their classrooms but instead they can create their learning environment where ever they want.

According to many researchers today's world is becoming more and more connected and global and people are being as mobile as possible. In order for students to address their needs in language learning there are various technologies available for them. Those facilities are appreciated by students and educators as well. Among those useful technologies smartphones are being used in pedagogical concept too. Authors Vavoula and Sharples (2002) consider learning as mobile in three ways: *'in terms of space (like the workplace, at home, at places of leisure), in terms of different areas of life (work demands, self-improvement, or leisure), and in terms of time (during the day, night, week days and weekends)'*. In this case learning and mobility seem to take place anywhere and anytime since people carry them along all time. Based on previous studies MALL has been useful for the acquisition of vocabulary.

Additionally, mobile phones offer the possibility to design a multimedia system for developing listening skills by different listening exercises. Therefore such facilities help learners practice their pronunciation as well by downloading a multimedia which gives them the opportunity to record their voice and compare it to the correct pronunciation.

3. Research Methodology

3.1 Methods

Quantitative method is used for the questionnaire and the qualitative one is used for the interview. This methodology is appropriate because it helps us find how much and how well the learners will be able to become autonomous learners by using computers for educational purposes especially for learning English as a foreign language in the Republic of Kosova.

3.2 Research Questions

- What does 'Learner Autonomy' mean to English Language teachers?
- What is teacher's role in promoting self-access learning through technology?
- How desirable and feasible do teachers feel in promoting Learner Autonomy by the use of CALL.
- How does CALL help learners become autonomous?
- How can CALL assist learners develop their language skills independently?
- To what extent, according to the teachers CALL contributes in fostering Learner Autonomy in ELT?

3.3 Hypotheses

H.1 Learner Autonomy can be promoted by the use of technology.

H.2 Computer Assisted Language Learning improves learners' English Language skills in autonomous way.

H.3 Learner Autonomy by the help of technology promotes willingness, voluntariness, motivation and challenge in ELT.

H.4 Learner Autonomy promotes lifelong learning.

3.4 Participants

The participants of this study were students and English Language teachers of three secondary public schools, in Gjilan-Kosova. There were approximately 30 teachers included in this study, whereas the number of students for the questionnaire was 300. They were between 14-23 ages, including both male and female learners. In order to get the results on this issue the questionnaire was used, a version of Lykert-type which consisted of 27 items where learners

were supposed to rate each items 1-22 from; Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Neutral, Agree, Strongly Agree whereas regarding to the items 23-27 learners gave their opinion by answering the questions there. However, the teachers' interview consisted of 10 items, where they gave their opinions about the items in the interview.

4. Analysis of Results and Discussions

4.1 Analysis of the Results of the Students' Questionnaire Teachers' Interview

Results from the students' questionnaire and teachers' interview show that, both learners and teacher believe that Computer Assisted Language Learning can help promoting learner autonomy by giving them different opportunities to work on their own and make them more responsible. It is also realized that learners need their teachers support in order to promote learner autonomy. They also think that CALL is helpful in promoting LA and developing learners' language skills and they are aware of their teachers' role, who should support learners to become autonomous.

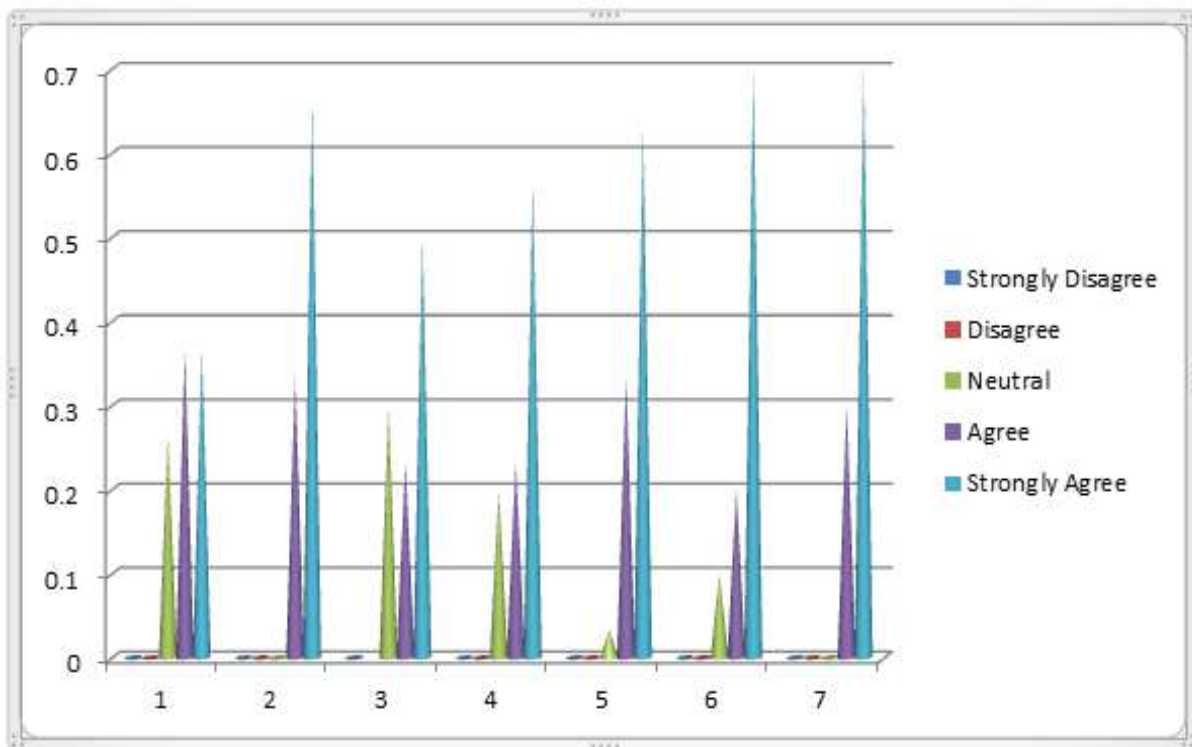


Figure 4.1: Results from the students' questionnaire

As it is shown in the chart above, for statement 1 **'I am informed about the concept of Learner autonomy'** there was no one who strongly disagreed or disagreed, **26.64%** of them were neutral, **36.63%** agreed, and **36.63%** strongly agreed.

They also were positive with the statement 2 **'Computers have a positive effect on success as a language learner'** **33.3%** agreed and **66.6%** strongly agreed.

They further agreed with the statement 3 **'I often use computers to learn'** with the following percentages; **29.97%** neutral, **23.31%** agreed, **49.95%** strongly agreed.

Additionally, for the statement 4 **'I like using a computer in English classes and outside classes'** **19.98%** were neutral **23.31%** agreed, **56.61%** strongly agreed.

Furthermore, they continue to give positive results for the statement 5 **'Computer-assisted language learning gives flexibility to autonomous learning'**, where **3.33%** were neutral, **33.3%** agreed, and **63.27%** strongly agreed.

Results for the next statement 6 **'Independent study in the self-access center is an activity which develops learner autonomy'** are as follows; **9.99%** neutral, **19.98%** agreed and **69.93%** strongly agreed.

Moreover, results for the statement 7 **'Computer Assisted Language Learning improves learners' English Language skills in autonomous way'** show that **29.97%** agreed and **69.93%** strongly agreed.

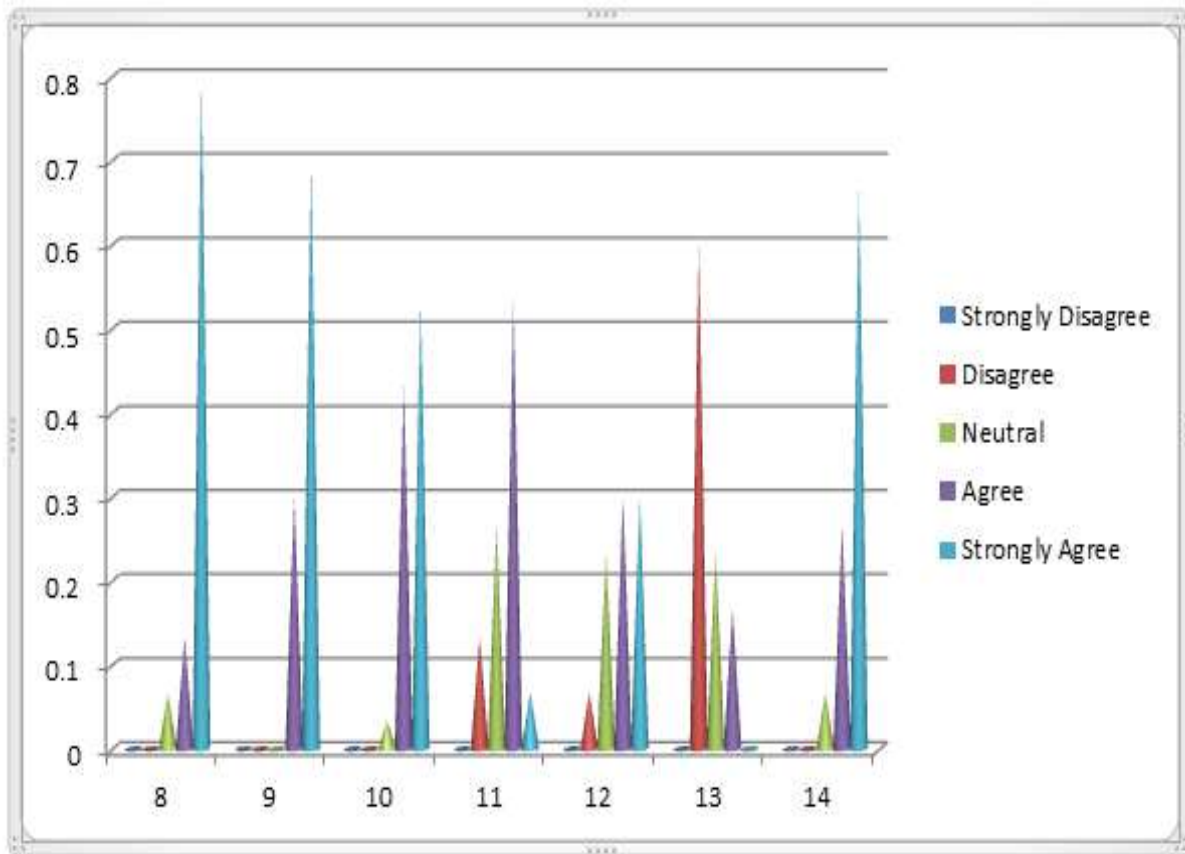


Figure 4.2: Results from the students' questionnaire

The above chart includes the results of statements 8-14. Regarding to the statement **8** 'Learner Autonomy with the help of technology promotes willingness, voluntariness, motivation and challenge in English language learning', **6.66%** of the learners were neutral, **13.32%** agreed and **79.92%** strongly agreed.

In addition the results from the statement **9** 'Learner Autonomy promotes lifelong learning' show that no one selected the options strongly disagreed, disagreed nor neutral however **29.97%** agreed and **69.93%** strongly agreed.

The results for the statement **10** 'Autonomy means that learners can make choices about how they learn' show that **3.33%** were neutral, **43.29%** agreed and **53.28%** strongly agreed.

Furthermore the results for the statement **11 'Individuals who lack autonomy are not likely to be effective language learners'** show that **13.32%** disagreed, believing that learner can be effective even if they do not show any effort to work independently, **26.64%** were neutral, **53.28%** agreed and **6.66%** strongly agreed.

For the statement **12 'Involving learners in decisions about what to learn promotes learner autonomy'** the results are as follows; **6.66%** disagreed **23.31%** neutral, **29.97%** agreed and **39.96%** which makes the majority strongly agreed with that.

The **13th** statement '**Learner autonomy means learning alone**' shows different percentages where **59.94%** disagreed, **23.31%** neutral and a few of them agreed with **16.65%**.

The results for the statement **14' Confident language learners are more likely to develop autonomy than those who lack confidence'** shows that **6.66%** of the learners chose the option neutral, **26.64%** agreed and **66.6%** strongly agreed.

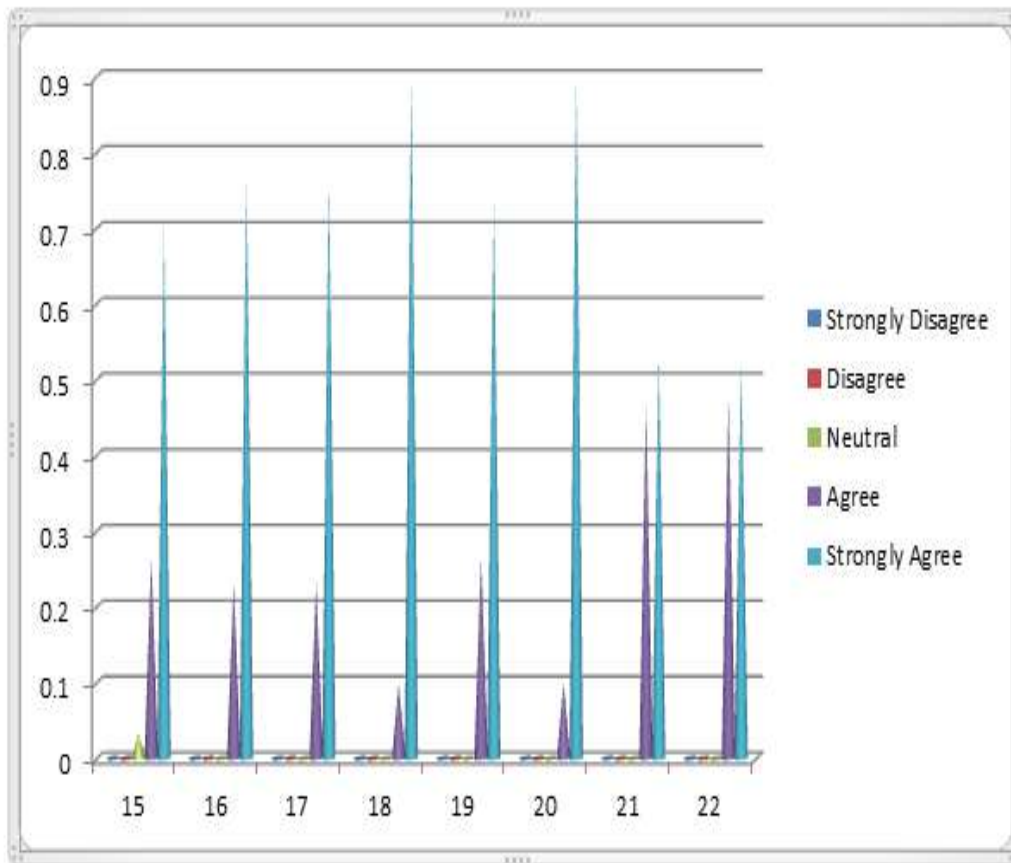


Figure 4.3: Results from the students' questionnaire

This chart includes the results of statements 15-22. For the next statement **15' Learner autonomy cannot be promoted in teacher-centered classrooms'** only the options; neutral, agree and strongly agree were selected with **3.33%, 26.64%, 69.93%**.

The results for the statement **16, 'Learner autonomy is promoted through activities which Computer Assisted Language Learning gives learners opportunities to learn'** show that **33.3% agreed and 76.59% strongly agreed**.

Further on for the statement **17' Learning how to learn is very important in developing learner autonomy'** again only two options were selected with **23.31% for agree and 76.59% for strongly agree**.

It is also realized that learners consider the use of the internet really helpful in promoting learner autonomy where they give positive results for agree **9.99%** and **89.91%** for strongly

agree for the statement **18' Out-of-class tasks which require learners to use the internet promote learner autonomy'**.

Moreover, they range motivation at a highest importance by giving the percentages **26.64%** for agree and **73.26%** strongly agree for the statement **19 'Motivated language learners are more likely to practice learner autonomy than learners who are not motivated'**.

In this issue the role of the teacher is also considered highly important where learners give those percentages for the statement **20 'The teacher has an important role to play in supporting learner autonomy'** with **9.99%** agree and **89.91%** strongly agree.

Finally we have the same results for the last two statements **21' Teachers' proficiency of using computers and their attitudes towards learner autonomy in language learning largely defines my own attitude to independent learning through CALL'**.

Lastly for the **22th statement' To become autonomous, learners need to develop the ability to evaluate their own learning'** with **46.62%** for the option agree and **53.28%** strongly agree.

For the rest of the questions where learners and teachers were supposed to give their opinions about the implementation of learner autonomy with the use of technology, it is seemed that all of them believe that CALL can help them develop the LA by considering lots of useful available programs on the internet. However, they stated that the role of the teachers is also important, who should guide them to choose the appropriate track in order to meet their needs.

4.2 Findings and Conclusions

Findings from the first research question **'What does 'Learner Autonomy' mean to English Language teachers** show that according to the teachers learner autonomy means students' ability to learn independently also their ability to learn the things they are interested in. They also mentioned that it is ability or even a level that not every learner can reach since they should be able to set themselves goals and then work hard independently to reach those goals. Additionally, they consider LA as the capacity learners take some control over their learning, also the ability to act on oneself, regardless of what others may or may not be doing, meaning that if a student wants more autonomy it means that they have an idea of what they want to learn,

and are initiated a guided self-study. Moreover, according to them it is a piece of puzzle in learning outside of usual English classroom, or learning through various websites on the Internet’.

Additionally, findings from the second research question ‘**What is teacher’s role in promoting self- access learning through technology**’ show that according to the teachers their role in this aspect should be more in pinpointing the ways and the sites where autonomous learning through technology may be developed. They see themselves as a motivator and a good adviser, believing that teachers can help develop students' learner autonomy by demonstrating how to use available technology to gather and disseminate credible information. Teachers can easily promote autonomous learning with technology since they can encourage learners to search on the internet for specific topics independently and then discuss them in the classroom. This can be done by suggesting learning different useful links with different exercises that give immediate results.

Findings from the third research question ‘**How desirable and feasible do teachers feel in promoting Learner Autonomy by the use of CALL**’ are found in the teachers’ interview where all the teachers stated that Promoting learner autonomy with the use of CALL is really desirable for most of the teachers by being aware of its advantages also finding it a great facilitator which makes their teaching easier. In general, the teachers think that computers are useful in increasing learner motivation. They say that the reason for thinking so is that this is related to the fact that by using computers in English classes, learners will be more creative, they will not be bored by the books and they will be also more independent in learning English language. Therefore, by using computer learners will be able to search materials and enrich their vocabulary as well. However, one of the teachers stated that according to her, students become lazy when finding ready materials on a computer and they got used to this phenomenon by using things from the internet and as a result they read and create less on their own.

Findings from the fourth research question ‘**How does CALL help learners become autonomous**’ are found in the students’ questionnaire which show that all of the students stated that computers help a lot, believing that CALL gives learners full access to everything they need and enable them to work and study on their own which makes them independent learners. They support them in developing their own ideas and make the learning easier by making learners

more responsible and autonomous on the task. Therefore, they indicate that they feel more independent and self-sufficient and perceived themselves as flexible learners.

Findings from the fifth research question '**How can CALL assist learners develop their language skills independently**' come from the two instruments students' questionnaire and teachers' interview. The students stated that there are lots of available programs on the internet. By using CALL learners can practice their reading, writing, listening, and speaking. In addition, they said that it has a significant role, because of its attractive- practical aspects, quickness and efficiency during the learning process. In this regard, they stated that CALL is the best way to promote learner autonomy being aware that it is a multifunction device, starting from writing a letter, communicating in any distance to designing any postcards. Furthermore, students can have access to online tutorials, exercises and tests that their schools may put online and work independently. Moreover, the interview teachers claimed that It may help in different ways such as searching for educational sites on the internet where the learner may sit at home and practice language skills, also grammar, pronunciation and speaking as well by chatting and talking with their peers verbally through different social networking sites. The most helpful activities mentioned for developing language skills are; Multimedia activities, Combination of images and sounds ,Combination of audio and text, Power point presentations, Reading comprehension, Recording and making corrections, Chat with audio and video, Practicing pronunciation, Practicing spelling, Watching movies, Listening to English songs, Language puzzle games, Web-Quests'.

Findings from the sixth research question '**To what extent, according to the teachers CALL contributes in fostering Learner Autonomy in ELT**' show that they said that it has a significant role, because of its attractive- practical aspects, quickness and efficiency during the teaching process. In this regard, they stated that it would be impossible to fulfill their tasks, without using computer, being aware that it is a multifunction device. Furthermore, the teachers think that the computer is a resource for teachers and students, where teachers can get ideas from other teachers, get research reports, and interface with other teachers. And students can have access to online tutorials, exercises and tests that their schools or universities may put online, find pen pals on various sites.

Consequently, as it is shown the role of computer is highly important in developing learner autonomy in language learning. Results from the instrument show that, learners believe that Computer Assisted Language Learning can help promoting learner autonomy by giving them different opportunities to work on their own and make them more responsible. It is also realized that learners believe that learner autonomy cannot be developed alone, however, learners need their teachers support in order to promote learner autonomy.

Another important finding of this study was that learners were at the willingness to be involved in the learning process. In general, they agreed with the idea that students should be involved in the decision making process regarding to the selection of the materials which meet their needs.

In addition, teachers as well find CALL helpful in promoting LA and developing learners' language skills and they are aware of their role who should support learners to become autonomous. So, the findings from this research study show that both learners and teachers consider CALL helpful in improving autonomy in the teaching and learning process. However, the main concern is the lack of sufficient computer technology at the schools where they teach.

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