**Educational Psychology Dr. Hichem GHEMBAZA**

**Master One Semester II**

**Part Three: *Students Psychological Dimension and the Teaching Practice***

**Lesson 7**

***D )- Autonomy Enhancement:***

* Referring back to the constructivist theory we can notice the pervasive role of learner autonomy in building up language learning. The constructivist theory states that: “*knowledge cannot be taught but must be constructed by the learner*” Candy (1991) in Benson (2001: 35).
* Such an approach to language learning clearly supposes that the learning process relies substantially on the learners’ abilities to undertake learning on their own. Such a kind of learners’ enterprise and independence in learning is referred to as learners’ autonomy. The latter can be defined as: “*a capacity to take control of* *one’s own learning in the service of one’s perceived needs and* *aspirations*” Aoki (1999) in Arnold (1999: 144).
* Aoki’s conception of autonomy can be supported by some perceptions held by humanistic psychology researchers, like Maslov (1970) and Rogers (1983), who think that students’ “thoughts, feelings and motivation” are important elements contributing in the learning process (Schalkwijk et al. (2002) in Savignon(2002)).
* From a starting point in cognitive psychology which holds that learning is built up through “collecting” and “storing” information in the brain, researchers studied metacognition and the effects of metacognitive activities on the learning achievement and found a positive correlation between the two (Schalkwijk et al., 2002).
* Therefore, they pointed out to the teachability of “the effective use” of both learning strategies and metacognitive skills leading to explore metacognition as an element that can enhance learner autonomy

(Schalkwijk et al., 2002).

* Yet, Vygotsky (1978, 1986) maintains that complete autonomy cannot be beneficial for the students. He suggests that learning can take place only through the practice of interaction under the prerequisite guidance of the teacher or the collaboration of peer learners who may play the role of “mediators” (Schalkwijk et al., 2002). In the same context, Little (1990) affirms that: “*In the classroom context, autonomy does not entail an abdication of responsibility on the part of the teacher; it is not a matter of letting the learners get on with things as best they can*”Little (1990) in Benson (2001: 48)
* As to Benson (2001), he describes autonomy and reinforces Holec’s (1981) and Little’s (1991) perceptions of the same issue. He points out to three main areas where autonomous learners may take control over their “own learning” (Holec,1981): learning management, cognitive processes and learning content. Benson (2001) explains that:

“*These three levels of control are clearly* *interdependent. Effective learning management depends* *upon control of the cognitive processes involved in* *learning, while control of cognitive processes* *necessarily has consequences for the self-management* *of learning. Autonomy also implies that self-management* *and control over cognitive processes* *should involve decisions concerning the content of* *learning*”

Benson (2001: 50)

* It is worth mentioning that learner autonomy is reported to be closely linked to motivation. Brophy (2004), rehearsing Deci’s, Schwartz’s, Sheinman’s and Ryan’s (1981) findings, states that enhancing students autonomy correlates positively with a higher level of motivation and thus optimum learning results. In Brophy’s (2004) words:

“*students of autonomy-supportive teachers showed more curiosity, desire for challenge, and other evidence of mastery motivation, whereas the students of controlling teachers showed less of this mastery motivation and expressed lower confidence in their academic abilities and lower self-worth perceptions*”

Brophy (2004: 191)

* As far as the teacher’s role in enhancing learners’ autonomy is concerned,

Walter (1997) reviews three main roles, proposed by Voller (1997), portraying the teachers as: “facilitators, counsellors and resources”.

* A crucial keyword in learner’s autonomy is decision-making. Aoki (1999) underlines that learners are viewed as actual ‘members of a decision-making body’. They can cooperate with teachers, head teachers and even curricula designers when possible.
* Yet, Aoki (1999) maintains that learners are to experience partial autonomy first, i.e. they are not to make important decisions right from the beginning. They rather need to be guided with some support from the surrounding milieu.
* Aoki (1999), echoing Nedelsky (1989) mentions that such partial autonomy, depending on social support, may pave the way for learners to think about full autonomy. Such expectations among learners will nourish and reinforce their feeling of autonomy.

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