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**RESEARCH PAPER**

**Development of Personal Autonomy in English as the Second Language (ESL) Teachers and Learners in Pakistan**

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**ABSTRACT**

This paper explores Dearden's concept of personal autonomy for English as the Second Language (ESL) teachers and learners as an important aim of education. The personal autonomy can be effectively developed by English teachers who are critical agents, use modern knowledge; research oriented teaching approaches and technology. The findings reveal that creative pedagogy, critical pedagogy, experiential learning, and reflective thinking can be used as valuable and beneficial strategies for the development of personal autonomy with regards to ESL teaching and learning.

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**Introduction**

The purpose of the study is to discuss the development of personal autonomy regarding English as the Second Language (ESL) at higher education with the deployment of various pedagogical strategies such as, creative pedagogy, critical pedagogy, experiential learning and reflective thinking (see Figure 1).



Interestingly, the word autonomy is derived from Greek word “autonomia” that means freedom of expression and living according to personal choices. In Greek Mythology, Antigone is best example who is known for her personal autonomy of character (Dearden, 1975, p. 448). There are various connotations of word *personal autonomy* such as, self-direction, freedom, independence, dignity, rational choice, truth and sincerity (Dearden, 1975).

Most important aim of education at the university level is to build up the personal autonomy of students as it is manifested in their everyday life activities such as, choice of courses, extra-curricular activities, career choice, social and professional responsibilities, independent judgement and thinking, dignity, flexibility and decisions in life. The personal autonomy is all-encompassing ideal to be realized and the role of English teachers is to inculcate in pupils’ minds using drilling or repetition techniques to perform their tasks efficiently using ESL. This much wanted goal requires appropriate English language teaching strategies, methods and curricula. Some activities which promote this goal are personal writing, discussion and drama leading to varied forms of creativity and self- knowledge. The students are expected to have capacities for independence, self-direction and choice. In addition, autonomy means to have relevant skills, initiative and experience.

### **Literature Review**

It is very important to develop personal autonomy in ESL learners in formal education. This quality can be inculcated by their English teachers using various dynamic methods, strategies and techniques. Dearden (1975, p.449) asserts with regards to role of teachers, ‘*teachers must force independence on children*’. Curtis (2004) views that only autonomous teachers can extend the personal autonomy to students. Giroux (1988, p. 6) believes that attainment of personal autonomy in learning is a challenge as ‘*it raises critical questions about present day education*’.

Teacher education can play an important role to develop the quality of personal autonomy in English teachers through self-monitoring, self-reflection, self-evaluation, peer assessment, activation of metacognitive abilities, critical inquiry, discussion boards, self-selected research topics, learning communities and e-collaboration (Bauman, 1992, p. 202).

According to Giroux (1994;1997), the features of post modern world such as, economic uncertainty, crisis of identity, electronic print media, digitalization, consumer pedagogy have failed to infuse the critical awareness in learners. It is important to adapt curricula to current needs of the learners as they are the product of digitalization. Therefore, it is essential to teach concepts to contemporary youth using electronic information systems and popular culture to develop personal autonomy in them. Pakistani education system is based on traditional notions of curricula, pedagogy and assessment that do not develop critical thinking in learners to understand the meaning of work in the modern world. It neither addresses the students' attitudes, shifting aspirations and desires nor questions the prevailing economic insecurity and political chaos (Burke, 2000; Brookfield, 2003; Irfan, 2018). Everyday activities such as, exploring social media, listening music, watching TV, playing video games, shopping etc. can be incorporated in English language curricula and pedagogy to develop personal autonomy in ESL learners and teachers.

Smith (1994; 1998, p.127) discusses personal autonomy is '*interpersonal rather than intrapersonal*' because it shows our relationships with each other in the world. The learners develop the democratic values of personal autonomy such as, confidence, logic, sensibility, self-awareness with participation in problem solving activities under the supervision of their teachers (Bridges, 1998, p.3).

The postmodern educational system is devoid of creative activities as there is no questioning in the national curriculum (Abbs, 2003). The teachers are operators and not educators as they are instructed to deliver and assess learning. They distribute pre-selected skills and promote passive learning whereas education aims at making students as independent agents of their own actions and understanding as learning has creativity and critical orientation towards experience. Abb discusses creative pedagogy to enable learners to be autonomous agents. Creative pedagogy implies that there must be a space for reflection, contemplation and imagination for deep self- involvement of teachers and learners. Abbs' (2003) theory of creative pedagogy is helpful to develop personal autonomy in children and adults. Teacher education programmes in Pakistan must also organize creative pedagogy activities to develop personal autonomy of teachers.

Usher et al (1994) believes that literary texts which learners read and write have fragmentation and decentralisation to mirror postmodern conditions. He suggests experiential learning as an effective strategy to recognise the diverse experiences. English teachers must facilitate the knowledge for adequate interpretation. Diversity of experiences provides the learners a voice and develops adaptability, self-awareness and flexibility in them.

Reflective teaching prepares students to be free agents for taking independent decisions. In reflective teaching, the democratic goal to be acquired is personal autonomy (Bridges, 1998). The teachers and students become deconstructive in their readings of educational texts, their creation of values and the evaluation of courses. This strategy should be used by teacher education programmes and courses to equip teachers with the deconstructive manoeuvres for throwing off the inhibitions of realism and engaging in creative literary writing. In return, the trained teachers will make their students autonomous agents (Parker, 1997).

Critical pedagogy is another effective strategy that is used by teachers to promote personal autonomy in children and adults. It is the '*language of critique*' that mainly addresses the social needs of the individuals in a society (Friere, 2006; Giroux, 2004, p. 36). Critical pedagogy's emphasis is on critical reflexivity to bridge the gap between learning and everyday life for understanding of the connection between knowledge and power. The aim of education is to provide employment to students. Therefore, pedagogy is a commodity because education prepares pupils for specialised fields. Critical pedagogy is used to explain the meaning of work to students as it raises questions about contradictory issues to find out the resolution. Critical pedagogy assists students to reflect, debate and learn critically (Giroux, 2004, p.43). It enables students to critically evaluate texts and images and expands their skills, knowledge and authority to obtain democratic values. Educators critically question how and what to teach and teachers make students critical agents who link knowledge to social responsibility.

Barber (2013) observes that in Pakistan, there are many habits and norms which are detrimental to progress in English:

*'In Pakistan 20% teachers are daily absent and teacher absence has become the norm. The teachers who turn up are largely dependent on the textbooks, and the textbooks themselves are outdated. Teachers' mastery of the subject matter is often lacking, their pedagogical skills are limited and usually confined to the most basic rote learning with no attempt to ensure that the whole class is engaged. The classrooms are very large and ill-equipped. In addition, teacher education programs are information-giving rather than skill-building'. Thus, Pakistani ESL teachers confront tensions generated by the competing demands of learners' requirements, contextual constraints, syllabus specifications and their own theories of best practice (Irfan, 2018).*

## **Material and Methods**

### **Research Design**

This section discusses the study method, selection of sample and data analysis. The researchers designed a qualitative method to explore the issue. The selected instrument was interview. The interview questions were constructed for the faculty of Department of English. The instrument consisted of two types of questions

i.e. close ended and open ended. The close ended questions required the information about the participants' gender, age, qualifications and designation. Open ended questions were:

- What is the meaning of personal autonomy?
- Why does a teacher need personal autonomy at university?
- How can personal autonomy of a teacher be developed at university?
- Why do you think that critical pedagogy is a useful pedagogical technique for ESL teachers?
- How is experiential learning useful to develop teachers and students' personal autonomy?
- Why is creative pedagogy essential to develop ESL teacher's personal autonomy?
- How is reflective thinking related to personal autonomy of ESL teachers?

Ten faculty members from the Department of English consented to take part in the research.

The participants had expertise in English literature, linguistics and TESOL. The rationale for the selection of English faculty was that they use creative, reflective, critical pedagogy and strategies for teaching the students of Department of English. The interviews of 6 Lecturers and 4 Assistant Professors were recorded. Time for each interview was 20 minutes. The researchers received the consent forms from the faculty members before recording their interviews. The participants were ensured that their names will be kept confidential.

### **Data Analysis and Discussion**

The recordings were carefully transcribed and thematically categorized. The themes are views about personal autonomy, creative pedagogy, experiential learning, reflective teaching and critical pedagogy and the participants were given the acronyms such as, P1, P2, P3 and so. This section the perceptions about meaning, need, development of personal autonomy and various pedagogical strategies such as, critical pedagogy, creative pedagogy, reflective teaching and experiential learning that can be used to develop the personal autonomy.

### **Perceptions about personal autonomy**

The participants discuss their views about personal autonomy. P1 believes that personal autonomy means that *"a person must be given freedom to exercise his position as a teacher without complex procedure of approvals for each task from the*

competent authority". A perception is, "personal autonomy and human rights are inseparable" (P2). P3 reflects that it refers to "a professional independence of an individual in a university especially for making autonomous decisions about their professional tasks" and it is a "capacity to decide at one's own level" (P7). It is surmised from the participants' views that an individual should be equipped with personal autonomy to perform the professional tasks independently. A person should have freedom to take decisions autonomously without any hindrance from the competent authority. More importantly, personal autonomy is related to human rights.

### **Development of Personal Autonomy**

The personal autonomy can be developed through "capacity building workshops and seminars" (P3), "effective lesson planning and instructional strategies are useful activities" (P2), "freedom must be given to a teacher" (P4), "through ensuring self-respect, support and encouragement of the teacher" (P7) and "by inviting innovative ideas, suggestions and insights of the faculty" (P6). It is conjectured that ESL personal autonomy can flourish through the classroom application of technology, professional development workshops, and research seminars, planned lessons in a supportive, respectful and friendly environment. The development of personal autonomy is a prerequisite to implement innovative ideas in the university.

There is a need for personal autonomy because "a university is a place for propagating research oriented and critical thinking, these skills cannot be implemented without personal autonomy" (P5) "it is necessary to take risks in practical life and accept social roles" (P6). The university faculty should have the "personal autonomy in order to make learning more successful, to induce creativity and regulate responsiveness" (P8). It is perceived "personal autonomy enhances creative potential" (P9) and lastly "personal autonomy is needed for achieving goals and targets" (P10). It is interpreted from English teachers' views that without being equipped with personal autonomy the research skills, creativity, and critical thinking cannot be cultivated. The autonomous teachers can enhance the creative and reflective potential of their students in universities. It is implied that personal autonomy motivates ESL teachers and students to take up initiatives and fulfil the objectives of programs and lives.

### **Creative pedagogy an essential tool to develop teachers' personal autonomy**

It is interpreted, "it is a tool through which a teacher can be helpful in getting rid of traditionally rooted patterns" (P2) and "concept of outcome based education" (P4), "creative teaching refines the creative ability of the students" (P5), "a language teacher needs more creative strategies to ease the complex task of learning a foreign language for students and to make the language classroom more creative and fun for students" (P7), "creative pedagogy is intrinsically associated with teacher's personal autonomy" (P8). It gives freedom to teachers to think differently and innovatively" (P9) and "creative pedagogy ensures best teaching techniques" (P10). ESL teachers need creative pedagogy to escape the traditional approaches so that they can inspire the students to learn English as the second language.

### Need for Experiential Learning

The participants report, *"a teacher's personal experiences can pave way for refinement of his/her personal autonomy"* (P1), *"individual experiences and individual insights bring varied responses and interpretations to the text"* (P2). It is believed, *"by experiential learning teachers bring unique and exclusive insights and observations"* (P3), *"experiential learning enables a teacher to reflect outside the box"*(P4), *"experiential learning is active learning. It develops the sense of solution to concrete issues which in turn helps the teachers to reflect upon their daily teaching and learning experiences in the classroom"* (P6) and *"it helps a lot in the personal and professional development of teachers"*(P8). Experiential learning is an effective teaching strategy that is very useful to develop the personal autonomy of ESL teachers and learners. The personal experiences and observations of teachers and learners are extremely productive and insightful to critically analyse the literary texts. The everyday experiences can be constructively used to attempt the problem solving tasks in the classroom.

### Opinions about Reflective Teaching

It is discussed that *"reflective thinking is an essential feature of personal autonomy"*(P1), *"it is extremely important for teachers to bring their own insights and reflections to the text as well as invite students to do the same"*(P2), *"reflective teaching can help a teacher to formulate, develop and even modify previously used instructional strategies according to the needs of the students"*(P3) and *"it is a best approach to understand the structure and patterns of the system and an individual's role in it"*(P9). The reflective teaching logically develops personal autonomy regarding teaching and learning processes.

### Views about Critical Pedagogy

The views about critical pedagogy are, *"it produces a transforming relationship between students and teachers"*(P1), *"this strategy develops critical self awareness among students"*(P2), *"allows teachers to perform as transformative intellectuals to let students to voice their critical thinking"*(P3), *"promotes self-directed learning"*(P8), and finally *"it helps teachers in developing analytical approaches among students"*(P10). The participants believe that critical pedagogy leads to self-awareness to bring about radical transformation among individuals. The critical pedagogy also develops intrinsic motivation for self directed learning.

### Conclusion

In conclusion, both individualized learning and peer group tasks are needed to develop ESL personal autonomy in children and adults. The students will attain autonomy gradually unless the whole traditional system of education undergoes transformation. The methods of teaching and curriculum should include electronic media, popular culture, and learners' activities outside the classroom to refine their criticality for promoting personal autonomy in students and teachers as an

important quality of character. Being teacher trainers and faculty members of universities in Pakistan and UK, the researchers would suggest that it should be an aim of teacher education programmes to promote autonomy and critical awareness of teachers through various dynamic activities to understand the postmodern world's distinctive characteristics.



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