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RESEARCH PAPER

Challenges and Problems Faced by University Teachers, while Implementing Autonomous Learning in their University Classrooms

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PAPER INFO	ABSTRACT
	This research study aims to explore the barriers and hurdles may be faced by university teachers while implementing or adopting autonomous learning techniques in their university classrooms. Qualitative research design was used to conduct this research study because the purpose of the study was to explore teachers' views and perspective about implementing autonomous learning techniques. 10 university teachers who were teaching at university level to different classes were conveniently selected for this purpose. A self-developed interview guide was used to conduct interviews from university teachers. The interview guide was based on open ended probe type questions related to problems university teachers may face if they want to implement autonomous learning in their university classrooms. The average length of these interviews were 23 minutes. The researcher used thematic analysis to analyze qualitative data in this regard different themes and codes were generated to interconnect and simplify the important characteristics of the data. Teachers were opined that this may be a challenging task to implement autonomous learning techniques in their university classrooms and the reasons are: lack of teacher training, disciplinary problems and resistance from students, administrative hurdles, difficulties in developing assessment framework and creating motivational environment for autonomous learning techniques.

Introduction

Autonomous learning and parallel terms e.g., Self-regulated learning, Self-directed learning, and independent learning may be considered and promoted as quite a key objective in the higher educational system of developed countries (Borg & Al-Busaidi, 2012). Generally, the purpose of higher education and university education is not only to produce experts of different fields. The actual purpose of this tier of education is to produce lifelong and autonomous learning habits during their student and professional life. Autonomous learning considered as most integral part of many educational programs and courses in different western educational setups. The reason behind is, to make students autonomous and yield more responsible

students, these students may have comparatively more self-control over their learning opportunities, educational goals and educational streams. This type of learning may also help them to understand their autonomous role in their process of learning (Benson, 2016). These characteristics of autonomous learning may encourage students and teachers specifically and policy makers generally to shift paradigm of education from teachers directed learning to autonomous learning. Autonomous learning techniques may have gained a lot of reputation and recognition during recent times, but some educational researchers (Tomkin et al., 2019) still have reservation related to the effective outcomes of autonomous learning techniques in few contexts. Asian countries generally and Pakistani system specifically may have less effectiveness of autonomous learning techniques. Frequently known and prominent criticism on the effectiveness of autonomous learning is that, autonomous learning may be considered as not a suitable learning technique in eastern contexts because of the learners' dependence on their teachers as compared to western context (Herman, 2012; Morris, 2019).

During recent times, some studies (e.g., Black, 2007; Bølling et al., 2018; Deur, 2011) may highlight the importance of paradigm shift from conventional classroom settings to autonomous learning classroom settings. Teachers may also support this paradigm shift but they feel in eastern context there may be less organizational and policy making support to make this change effective. Teachers are also concerned that, in conventional settings of educational system the only concern and focus of teachers and students to complete curriculum and evaluate the students' performance through paper pencil tests. This traditional approach may be the reason to neglect the important purpose of education which is to produce and develop independent or autonomous learning habits among students (Green, 2008).

According to Guiffrida et al., (2013), self-directed academic motivation may also be produced in result of implementing autonomous learning techniques which may be a strong predictor of learners' lifelong learning in their educational and professional life. Autonomous learning may also be the reason, to some extent deep understanding of practical and theoretical concepts, higher academic achievement, decrease in dropout rate and learners' self-satisfaction during their classroom and outside classroom learning (Martin & Evans, 2018). As compare to autonomous learning, teacher directed learning is reason to produce controlled academic motivation, which may usually the reason of higher dropout rates, low academic achievement and negative feelings and distraction during class hours. School managers and educational leaders may need to establish an educational setup within their institutions which may support and encourage autonomous learning environment for both teacher and students (Siriwongs, 2015).

Lau (2017) describes that, autonomous learning techniques usually used to enhance learners' independence in their learning process and make them responsible for completion of their own learning tasks. Autonomous learning may also support learners; freedom in their daily work, e.g., assignments, projects and similar learning tasks and also reduce learners' dependence on their teachers. Autonomous learning basically changed the philosophy of traditional teachers' directed approach which usually supports the learners' dependence on their teachers. Autonomous learning techniques replace it with mutual help and also increased the role of teacher as facilitator. Usually in traditional classroom settings learners may not able to learner or engage themselves in learning activities if the teacher is not present in the class.

Autonomous learning supports that, presence of teacher in the class may not be necessary as the learners may be motivated to become more self-directed learners even if the teacher is not available in the class (Morris, 2019). The role of teacher is entirely different in autonomous learning context if compared to traditional teachers' directed learning. Teachers may be learning manager, resource provider, co-learners and more of a facilitator. Role of a teacher who supports autonomous learning is more of a helper in knowledge acquisition of learners' instead of a knowledge giver. Teachers usually support and show paths to students from where they may fulfil their learning needs and get supportive learning materials.

According to Lee et al., (2017), usually autonomous learning techniques may be based on learners autonomy as a basic footstep, which may include, learners' self-initiatives for their daily learning activities, and making effective and efficient learning decisions (e.g., all those decision with which they may be supposed to live their future life) related to their learning needs for example, setting learning goals, identify their learning needs, locating most needed learning resources, cooperative work with the help of peers and teachers, and plan their learning activities and strategies to learn effectively. This may also help learners to motivate themselves towards identifying, completing and selecting their learning assignments/projects, enhance their abilities to cope with learning problems and choosing the time, as well as location and mode of their learning activities. The role of the teacher is also having different dimension in these autonomous learning techniques, teacher may be considered as a counsellor instead of instructor, because there is almost less or no concept of instruction in this concept of learning. The focus of autonomous learning is non teachers directed work, e.g., students learn autonomously with their own learning/supportive materials, they have their own criteria for the betterment of their learning, they regularly self-evaluate their progress, students learn without the formal classroom settings and decide the required time to complete their learning tasks.

Autonomous learning techniques may be considered as deeper approach to learning. This may also be known as surface approach to learning and it is an important dichotomy of students' intents. The deep or surface approaches to learning may help students' ability to demonstrate their abilities to learn and work during their professional and student life (Hsu, 2017). Structures of Learning Outcomes (SOLO) taxonomy may also be an example of deeper approach to learning. This taxonomy also provides support that learners may only reach more holistic, and higher level of thinking when they may pass through a deeper or surface level of learning techniques. (Shogran et al., 2017).

Douglass and Morris (2014), while explaining the basics of the project famously known as Royal Society for the Arts Higher education, draw a holistic comparison of autonomous and dependent modes of learning based on the knowledge, skills, values and esteem, gained by the learners through both approaches. They explained that knowledge and skills which learners may gain through dependent mode of learning are transferred to the learners by others and also judged and evaluated by others. Students supposed to learner quietly without knowing the relevance of knowledge with their previous knowledge. The contexts and time of learning may also be decided by others. Learners gain knowledge and skills by themselves and also decide the time and place of learning in autonomous

mode of learning. Learners usually supposed to monitor and evaluate their learning performance and progress by themselves without depending or waiting for others.

The level and amount of learning and knowing through dependent mode of learning is external and may be withdrawn or vanished externally (e.g., when there may be no teacher in the class, students will not learn and because they are getting involved in learning involuntarily, the concepts and things they are learning may be forgotten after some time). Usually in dependent mode of learning failure is avoided because it may be considered as threat to learners' esteem (Ashurova & Ssali, 2015; Khiat, 2017). Autonomous mode of learning encourages students/learners to prove their self-worth by learning themselves and this habit may become part of their personality and may not be taken away easily. Learners in autonomous mode of learning take their failure as opportunity to learn in a better way which may also increase the level of their self-confidence. The learning priorities and judgments of their learning progress all are made by learners which may also be reason that these habits become the part of their personality traits (Guiffrida et al., 2013).

Mode of learning are globally changing from teachers centered learning (dependent mode of learning) to independent/autonomous mode of learning. Autonomous mode of learning may be widely considered as most effective mode of learning but the effectiveness of this mode may be context specific. Specifically, in Pakistani context there may be less support to implement or adopt this change. This may be the reason why university education is not fulfilling its purpose of producing lifelong and autonomous learners (Yasmin et al., 2019). There are administrative restrains while adopting new modes of teaching this may be the reason why old modes of teaching are widely being used. Autonomous mode of learning is also believed and considered as western mode of learning and may be considered as less effective in Asian contexts generally and in Pakistani context specifically (Yasmin & Sohail, 2018).

(Yasmin et al., 2019)) also argued that, university teachers are in favor of paradigm shift from teachers directed to autonomous mode of learning. The environment within their institution is generally discouraging and, non-supportive to this approach because of these constraints they are reluctant to implement it. The traditional dependent mode of learning may not be the reason to produce lifelong motivation among students to learner and do their work independently.

Recent studies (Jones & Dexter, 2014; Stoten, 2014) may also in the view that lifelong motivation to work and learn independently can only be developed among learners by making a paradigm shift from teacher directed learning to autonomous learning. The need of the time is that, university administration, policy makers and curriculum may provide favorable environment and support to implement and practice these autonomous learning techniques. Implementation and practicing of these techniques may help university education to fulfil its purpose to produce autonomous and lifelong learners. Therefore, this study aims to explore the hurdles and problems university teachers may face if they want to implement autonomous learning techniques in their classrooms.

Traditionally, teachers and researchers used to try find out the new and effective methods of learning through which students' may learn effectively and become lifelong learners. The focus of theses teachers and researchers is to find out

the learning techniques which may enable learners to learn autonomously. Eastern context generally and Pakistani system of education specifically discourage the autonomy of learners and may not support to implement autonomous learning in their educational system. Teachers may be in support of implementing autonomous learning but because of administrative hurdles, less institutional support and resistance from students they may not able to these learning techniques in their classrooms (Yasmin et al., 2019; Yasmin & Sohail, 2018).

The basic objective of this study is to explore the challenges and constraints university teachers may face if they want to implement autonomous learning techniques in Pakistani university classrooms. This study will highlight the implications of autonomous learning techniques for policy makers, educational administrators, and teachers for the shift in paradigm from traditional teachers' centered learning to autonomous learning techniques. The research and professional organizations which are trying to find out innovative and new teaching and learning strategies may be benefit from the results of this research, as till now this specific domain of teaching and learning may be considered comparatively less explored in the Pakistani educational context.

Material and Methods

The basic purpose of this research was to find out the problems faced by university teachers while implementing autonomous learning techniques in their university classrooms. The researcher used qualitative research approach to explore the problems faced by university teachers while implementing autonomous learning techniques. The researcher conducted semi-structured interviews to collect the qualitative data of the study. Interviews may be considered as the most frequent and effective tool for the collection of qualitative data (Dörnyei, 2007). Interviews provide an opportunity to the researchers that they may able explore in depth views of participants and also enables the researchers to find out the reasons which may shape the views of participants. Interviews also help participants to share their detailed views and also enable them to interpret their views about different problems, they may observed or experienced (Cohen et al., 2017).

The semi-structured interviews were used to collect qualitative data of the study. This may benefit the researcher in two possible ways, that it may allow researcher to plan the initial structure (e.g., questions and plan) for the interviews tentatively. Secondly the open ended nature of semi-structured interviews may motivate the researcher to ask the questions from participants in a more investigative and flexible manner. This may benefit the researcher to get in-depth information related to important topics. Semi-structured interviews may also enable researcher to shuffle the sequence of question according to the progress and nature of the interviews during the interview process (Dörnyei, 2007).

Sample

10 university teachers teaching at Institute of Education and Research University of the Punjab conveniently selected to collect the qualitative data for the study. Institute of Education and Research is a teacher training institute and offers different teacher training programs to prospective teachers. The teachers teaching at this institute may have better and comprehensive knowledge related to autonomous

learning as compared to other university teachers because they are affiliated with teacher training and teaching methodologies.

Instrument

The interview guide to collect qualitative data for the research was developed by the researcher himself. The interview guide was developed by keeping the view that the challenges and hurdles university teachers may face if they want to implement autonomous learning techniques in university classrooms. The interview guide was based on some probe related and open ended question to explore in-depth views of teachers. Prior to final data collection researcher piloted the interview guide to the five university teachers teaching in the related context which researcher intend to select for this study. The primary emphasis of the interview guide was the questions related to problems and difficulties university teachers may face if they want to implement autonomous learning techniques in their classrooms. To find out administrative constraints was the major focus of the interview guide developed for this study.

The main focus of the questions of interview guide was based on the teaching experience of teachers at university level, their awareness and opinion about autonomous learning techniques, either they are in support of giving autonomy to learners or not, the possible pre-requisites they may suggest for implementing and practicing autonomous learning techniques, and expected challenges they may face while implementing autonomous learning in their university classrooms.

Data Collection Procedure

The researcher used semi-structured interviews to collect the qualitative data of the study. Thu purpose was to explore and find out the possible challenges the constraints and challenges university teachers may face if they try to implement autonomous learning techniques in their university classrooms. Researcher seek the formal consent form 10 university teachers working in Institute of Education and Research prior to the start of interview process. The procedure and method of interviews were orally shared with the participants. Confidentiality of their opinions were also ensured to the participants by the researcher. The researcher conducted the interviews within the premises of the university to ensure the comfortability of the participants. Eight participants were comfortably responded to the interview questions in English language. The interviewees were enthusiastic and cooperative, which resulted their involvement in interview process. I conveyed them at any stage of interview they may continue in Urdu or Punjabi language if they may feel any difficulty while continuing in English language. Two interviews were conducted in Urdu language because these participants feel that they can more conveniently express their opinion in Urdu language. I tried to maintain friendly and comfortable environment, so that they may express their opinion in free and comfortable manner. The average length of the interviews was 23 minutes.

Procedure of Data Analysis

Firstly, the recordings of the 10 interviews conducting from university teachers were transformed, to convert these interviews into the plausible text format for further use. There were two interviews conducted in the Urdu language, these interviews were translated into English language after the transformation of these

two interviews. Secondly researcher decided to used thematic data analysis technique to further analyzing the data. According to (Berg & Lune, 2012) if the nature of data is qualitative, that may be analyzed through converted it into understandable themes and sections which supposed to be materialized from different connected parts of the qualitative data. Data reduction and conversion process is considered as most critical part of qualitative data analysis. This process needs to be completed in a way that, the quality of data may not be compromised or effected at any stage of data reduction and conversion process (Cohen et al., 2017). I followed accepted protocols of qualitative data analysis and arranged the qualitative data into different open codes, the open codes were explored during review of related literature and the focus was to find out the hurdles and challenges university teachers may face if they want to implement autonomous learning techniques in their university classrooms.

Lastly, I created and aligned different codes to interlink and streamline different key characteristics of the qualitative data of this study. This helped me to establish a detailed set of existing and emerging classifications of qualitative data. I tried to present categories and themes of qualitative data related to their related characteristics and contextual background available in the qualitative data. I analyzed and interpreted qualitative data according to themes and code created in line with hurdles and problems university teachers may face if they want to implement autonomous learning techniques in their university classrooms.

Results and Discussion

Following are themes derived from the data collected for this research study:

Autonomous Learning a Challenging Task

All the participants were in the view that, autonomous learning may be a challenging task for the teachers and students if implemented in the Pakistani classrooms. These participants in support of implementing autonomous learning techniques but they were in opinion that, both the teachers and students may not or have less exposure of teaching and learning related to autonomous learning techniques. Most of the students reached at university level after passing different tiers of education (e.g., elementary, secondary and higher secondary education). During these levels they may have developed a strong dependence on their teachers and have never tried to learn autonomously. Interviewee A, said that level of dependence of students on their teacher is deep and may not be changed easily. There may be a strong resistant from students if autonomous learning may be implemented at university level. Interviewee C, quoted an example of prevailing COVID 19 situation when the system of higher education was shifted to online learning. This online mode of learning was not students centered but it demands a bit more involvement and active participation of students. Students showed resistance to this mode of learning and they were less interested in learning through this mode, if suddenly mode of learning may be shifted to autonomous mode of learning students may show more resistance. Interview D opined that, being third world country we need to implement this mode of learning from early grades so that, students may become habitual of this and this may become part of their learning habits. These opinions of respondents may also validate the findings of (Morris, 2019) that, the current educational practices in Asian context are mostly basis on behavioristic approach of learning and continue hand to hand with teacher directed learning. Non-availability of teachers in the classrooms where students needs to learn themselves

directly from higher education or university level may leads to higher dropout rate and low academic performance of students.

Lack of Teachers Training

Interviewees A, D, E, G, I, J were in opinion that, the role of teachers' while implementing autonomous learning techniques, in university classrooms is quite crucial. The teachers in Asian context generally and in Pakistani context specifically are trained for teacher directed learning techniques. They are comfortable while teaching through teacher directed lecture method approaches. Interview G mentioned that, during semester system time span of a semester is limited and students may waste their time in activities and probably at the end of semester they have done nothing. He said, he is in favor of implementing these autonomous learning techniques to produce better self-regulated learning and lifelong learners. This may not be possible without the help of trained university teachers, who may be well aware of the autonomous learning techniques. These findings of the study are in line with the studies of (Morris, 2019, 2020; Ward et al., 2018; Yasmin et al., 2019) that, Asian generally and Pakistani education system specifically, discourages the autonomous learning techniques, because teachers are less of may be have no awareness about autonomous learning techniques. They are not trained for implementing these learning techniques and pre-requisite if implementing autonomous learning techniques is that teacher must be trained and well aware of these techniques (Schweder, 2020).

Disciplinary Problems

Interview J were in opinion that, in the current system of education in Pakistan which supports teachers' centered classroom settings. The autonomous learning may create disciplinary problems within classroom and within institutions. The students are bound to sit in controlled teachers centered classroom settings and availability of teacher during class hours is necessary. Autonomous learning supports no or less face to face interaction with students, during the non-availability of teachers, students may create disciplinary problems. They may not sit in their classes and university administration may consider teachers as responsible for this problem. Interviewee H was in opinion that; autonomous learning must be implemented in the university classrooms but initially it may be implemented under the strict supervision of teachers to avoid disciplinary problems. The role of teacher may be supervisory and to support students during class when they may face any difficulty to complete their work. These findings of this research are in line with the findings of (Beckers et al., 2019; Nasri, 2019) that, the role of teacher while implementing autonomous learning in the contexts where no concept of learner autonomy exist is very critical. The role of teacher is like walking on a thin wall, if teachers may be a bit more supportive this may be like exactly the teachers' centered classroom. The less support may create disciplinary problems and may decrease the academic performance of students.

Administrative Hurdles

Interviewees B, C, G, H, I, J were in view that, there may be hurdles from university administration because in Pakistani context university administration may not be aware of effectiveness of autonomous learning techniques. Interview L mentioned that, while teaching the course of research methodology he tried to implement students centered methodology and assigned projects to students instead

of paper pencil tests. The institutional head asked him not to award projects as final assessment because students can complete their projects through cheating. He was in opinion that, this mind set of institutional heads is discouraging autonomous learning techniques, and without changing this whole mind set this may not be possible to implement autonomous learning techniques. Teachers also opined that, without policy change and taking educational administrators into the confidence and their support to implement autonomous learning. Teachers are not able to implement autonomous learning techniques alone.

These results of the study further extend the, support to (Yasmin et al., 2019; Yasmin & Sohail, 2018) that, all the stakeholders in Pakistani context need to revamp all the educational policies , because the existing policies are in support of teacher centered learning approach. The policy change may help to nourish the institutional environment, which may support and accept autonomous learning techniques. Theses constraints related to institutional culture, and policy making constraints may not be handled by teachers alone. The whole educational system from policy making to implementation needs to be revamped prior to implement autonomous learning techniques in Pakistani classrooms.

Preparedness of Students for Autonomous Learning

Most of the participants were in view that autonomous learning techniques are necessary to make students lifelong learners. Autonomous learning techniques are need of the time and need to be implemented in university classrooms, because after passing out from the university most of the students will not get any chance to learn again in a formal setting. Interviewees (A, C, D, E, F, G) opined that, prior to implement autonomous learning techniques students need to be prepared for this change. Students deep dependence on their teachers during their previous classes may be a hurdle to implement autonomous learning if implemented directly from university or higher education level. Interviewee F opined that, autonomous learning needs to be implement from first semester e.g., BS program is a four-year degree program based on eight semesters. Autonomous learning needs to be implemented from first semester of BS program so that, students may prepare themselves gradually to adjust in this autonomous learning environment. These findings of this research are aligned with the findings of (Jossberger et al., 2018) that at first stage autonomous learning needs to be implemented gradually and from early grades. They argued that, in the contexts where autonomous learning may not have any or less footprints, autonomous learning may be less effective if implemented. The previous learning experience of students in the contexts which support teacher centered learning and students have developed habits of teachers' dependence, may make autonomous learning less effective if implemented directly from higher grades. The preparedness of students by implementing autonomous learning gradually from early grades may make results of autonomous learning effective and useful (Schweder, 2020).

Pre-Requisites of Implementing Autonomous Learning

Interviewee I supported the implementation of autonomous learning in Pakistani university classroom. He opined that, there may be some pre-requisites to implement autonomous learning in Pakistani context. Autonomous learning may be useless to implement prior to few important pre-requisite changes. The whole system of education for example, textbooks, curriculum, and mindset of teachers, students and policy makers needs to be changed. All these indicators support teacher centered

learning approach and discourage learner autonomy. Curriculum and textbooks are designed to support teachers' centered learning even in curriculum document and textbooks recommend method of teaching is lecture method. Educational policies at national level are also in favor of teacher centered learning approach and discourage learners' autonomy. All of sudden this may not be easy to change the policies at national level at it will take years to change. He suggested that, initially autonomous learning may be implemented by making policies at institutional level and giving teachers more or full autonomy that, they may teach or used any teaching method which they feel will be helpful to promote learners' autonomy. Teachers may also try to develop sense of autonomy among their students that, role of teacher is not to teach the whole content word by word but to facilitate students during their learning problems. Interviewee H proposed that, a proper framework of implementing autonomous learning needs to be developed with the help of all stakeholders. All the necessary pre-requisites need to be addressed to make autonomous learning more useful in Pakistani context. (Arnold, 2017; Morris, 2019) in their studies suggested the similar pre-requisites to implement autonomous learning in the context where no policies to support autonomous learning exists and education system as a whole supports teacher centered learning. They suggested that, a complete framework which may support to implement autonomous learning may be developed prior to implement autonomous learning. Teachers with more autonomy during their classroom may also be helpful to make autonomous learning effective and useful.

Conclusion

The basic purpose of this research study was to explore the challenges and huddles university teachers may face if they want to practice autonomous learning techniques in Pakistani university classrooms. The qualitative research design was used to explore these problems. 10 university teachers were interviewed by the researcher to explore the problems university teachers may face while implementing autonomous learning in their university classrooms. Most of the teachers were in favor of implementing autonomous learning in their university classrooms. They were in view that, autonomous learning may be less effective in Pakistani context because the system of education in Pakistani context usually based on teacher centered techniques. Students are habitual of learning in teacher centered environment and may not accept this paradigm shift suddenly. They opined that, there may be few challenges and hurdles e.g., administrative hurdles, resistance from students, lack of teacher training, disciplinary problems and less preparedness of students if they try to implement autonomous learning techniques in their university classrooms. Interviewees suggested that autonomous learning may be implemented in Pakistani classrooms after making few pre-requisites changes e.g., curriculum and textbooks change, favorable policy making and support from university administration.

Recommendations

The researcher recommended that, autonomous learning is an innovative learning approach and needs to be implemented in Pakistani classrooms from early grades e.g., school grades. The researches of experimental and longitudinal in nature needs to be conducted at primary and elementary level to measure the effectiveness of autonomous learning in Pakistani context. This is highly recommended based on the opinions of teachers that, autonomous learning needs to be implemented from

early grades so that, students may develop habits of learning independently and autonomously and may have get exposure of autonomous learning.

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