

# INTEGRATING INDEPENDENT LEARNING WITH THE CURRICULUM

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## **Abstrak**

Makalah ini bertujuan mendeskripsikan konsep-konsep pembelajaran mandiri terpadu dengan kurikulum. Kriteria penerapan pembelajaran mandiri terpadu dengan kurikulum bisa dikelompokkan dalam enam wilayah yang bersinggungan satu sama lain; pembuatan kebijakan, manajemen, pengembangan staf, training pembelajar, sumber belajar, dan desain kurikulum. Fasilitas yang efektif untuk perubahan kurikulum di dunia yang semakin mengglobal mensyaratkan para pembuat kebijakan kurikulum, pengembang dan pelaksana memiliki kompetensi yang lebih kompleks dan model referensi. Oleh karena itu, penerapan pembelajaran bahasa mandiri akan berhasil manakala dipadukan dengan kurikulum bahasa dan merupakan tambahan yang digaribawahi dalam kerja kelas. Hal disebabkan oleh kenyataan bahwa pembelajar mandiri diharuskan melakukannya dalam waktu lama dan latihan.

## **Kata Kunci**

Terpadu, Pembelajaran Mandiri, Kurikulum

## **Background**

Today is the era of educational reform. Education should not only be viewed as a means to give wide opportunities to construct new knowledge rather than receiving it from ones who are responsible to transferred. Knowledge is an abstract thing that must be constructed by the learner (Candy in Benson, 2001). This is also being the data of the constructivists that have promoted that effective learning begins from the learners' active participation in the process of learning. If knowledge is constructed uniquely within each individuals through process of social interaction, it follows interaction, it follows that learning will be most effective when learners are fully involved in decision about the content and process of learning. Theoretically speaking, the teaching of a language should be based on the cognitive psychology that considers learning as information processing, in the sense that learning takes place when learners are able to integrate new information into schemata of knowledge they already know, which is stored in the long term memory (Anderson, 1983).

Thus, applied to learning, an individual learner has his own systems of construct and this system will be sharpen and develop over long periods of time throughout the attempts to make experiences that are uniquely one's own. In short, a learner holds his own way to bear on the learning task. The idea to transfer knowledge is against the truism idea that every human is gifted with an ability to learn on their own. Then, integrating independent learning with the curriculum is actually the only attempt to treat learners' personal quantities to learn new things.

One of the main aspects considered significant in the development and renewal of school curriculum are becoming more challenging in today's rapidly changing world. Effective facilitation of curriculum changes in an increasingly globalize world requires that curriculum policy makers, developers and implementers posses more complex competencies and reference models. In line with this, the curriculum for English language teaching (ELT) is linked to include independent learning integrates with the curriculum that must be a general guideline for students' active learning. Therefore, curriculum is

not too details and it can be developed individually and creatively by teachers appropriate with student's potencies, condition of resources and other local condition.

It is clear that the vehicle which is the means to produce what learners learn is the curriculum. In our experience, the design of the curriculum is crucial to the successful implementation or otherwise of independent learning. The other key factors identified (policy making, management, staff development, learner training, learning resources) can be optimally in place but without a curriculum which values the development of independent learning and makes time and space for it in the academic timetable, there is likely to be limited success.

Above all, independent language learning is most successful when it is integrated firmly into the language curriculum and is not just a bolt-on addition to classroom work. This is because learner independent has to be acquired over time and with practice.

### **Challenges Faced When Implementing Independent Learning**

Learner autonomy has become one of the issues in English language teaching and learning. In many learning contexts, learners are now expected to assume more responsibility for their own learning by setting their learning goals, identifying their own needs, choosing and deciding how to use materials they have selected, as well as asserting their own progress. We may recognize that a move to integrate independent learning into our teaching program is a viable and desirable objective but there remain a number of key challenges and threats: 1) The design and delivery of a traditional curriculum may have to be adapted with resulting resourcing and quality assurance (QA) implications; 2) Time, money and expertise are needed to prepare independent learning materials and support the learner; 3) The cost and space implications of setting up and maintaining an up to date self-access centre are not inconsiderable; 4) Some students are not happy with student-centered approaches; especially older learners and those from teacher-directed cultures; 5) The majority of students do not see

independent learning as a genuine alternative to classroom teaching, and 6) Plagiarism or evidence that learners have submitted their own work is an issue if independent learning is assessed.

Intrinsic motivation may not be enough to encourage learners to prioritize independent learning activities. An element of formative and summative assessments generally seen as a solution but this has more time and resourcing implications.

## **CIEL's 6 Key Areas of Implementing Successful Independent Language Learning**

According to CIEL (2002) project, it is important to address a number of key elements if independent learning (or any other educational objective) is to be successfully introduced and embedded. The criteria for the implementation of change here can be grouped in six overlapping areas: policy making, management, staff development, learner training, learning resources and curriculum design.

### **Policy Making**

If it does not already exist, it is important to consider the development of a policy statement which addresses the role of independent study/open learning and the provision and use of learning resources: 1) at institutional level, 2) at departmental/inter-departmental level, and 3) and within the language resources centre.

Without a policy framework which addresses implementation and resourcing issues, it will be difficult to implement independent learning in a coherent way and to attract institutional or departmental commitment.

### **Management**

Management of independent learning is likely to be complex if a number of departments are involved in the delivery of language teaching and the provision of language learning resources. In many

cases, the library may be the location for the language learning resources. It is difficult to plan an integrated curriculum when there may be few points of contact between departments, so it is crucial that where there is more than one unit: 1) There is appropriate co-ordination at some formal level, possibly through a Language Centre Board, or equivalent, on which all language providers/using faculties or departments are represented, 2) Teaching staff from the language departments are involved in the design, use and purchase of independent learning materials - without this there will be no sense of ownership and consequently no encouragement of learners to make use of the resources available.

Other management issues involve strategies for the management of change, staffing, evaluation procedures and practicalities such as access and location, centre design and layout, maintenance, cataloguing, copyright and presentation and storage.

### **Learner Training and Support**

Learners are not always keen to take up the challenge of learner independence and will need to be helped (or pushed) to acquire skills and confidence. In-class training or discussion of specific skills and strategies (e.g. language learning strategies, study skills, team-work), self-assessment) may be useful. They will need induction sessions and on-going support as they become familiar with language learning materials, equipment and the resources centre.

A designated language advisor will be able to provide on-going support and training and will be able to develop study guides and training materials. The role of the advisor is likely to be especially appreciated by non-traditional learners, learners with specific needs or disabilities and those working at a distance.

## **Learning Resources**

Independent learning can cater for individual needs and interests but a wide range of resources located in a pleasant working environment (either actual or virtual) is crucial if learners are to derive maximum benefit. Increasingly, new technology solutions will provide a source of up to date multimedia resources and language tools but it is important to provide a range of materials (reference, language practice activities, authentic texts, newspapers, course books etc.) in a mix of media. Few students, it seems, will actually read at length on a computer screen. Most will prefer to print something out for reading later.

Finding good self-access resources is not easy since few suitable commercial materials are available. Developing in-house materials is time-consuming and resource intensive. Since most institutions are in the same position, teaching very similar courses across the country to learners with very similar needs, we would benefit a great deal from pooling our efforts. This could be done most efficiently between a small number of institutions in a region who are geographically close enough for key staff to be able to meet on occasions. The subject centre will also have a role in seeking to identify and provide an online searchable database of resources.

## **Curriculum Design**

The design of the curriculum is crucial to the successful implementation or otherwise of independent learning. The other key factors identified (policy making, management, staff development, learner training, learning resources) can be optimally in place but without a curriculum which values the development of independent learning and makes time and space for it in the academic timetable, there is likely to be limited success. Considerations of how to embed independent learning in the curriculum will include:

1. the curriculum focus (e.g. topic, task, functional, grammar-based, mixed syllabus);
2. the delivery - ratio of teacher contact time to independent learning time, face to face or at a distance, degree of 'openness';
3. the content - type of classroom/independent learning activities and tasks;
4. the role of the teacher - how directive and how far allowing learners to lead;
5. the role of the learner - how involved in the planning and learning process, involvement in group work, tandem learning, peer teaching;
6. testing, self-assessment and evaluation;
7. progression;
8. needs analysis;
9. quality assurance.

The most crucial element, however, is the degree of integration of independent learning with the language curriculum. If the links are not in place, only the most dedicated of learners will prioritize independent learning in order to take charge of their own future. We hope that the discussions and case studies we have included throughout will stimulate ideas and develop good practice in the general provision of independent learning and its integration with the language curriculum.

Furthermore, related to the concept of meaningfulness in language teaching and learning is "integration". The integration of independent learning such as in the curriculum 1994 stresses the importance of teaching the elements of language (grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, and spelling) not in an isolated fashion, but deliberately integrated with the macro-skills. Thus, as language used naturally integrates the elements of language and the macro-skills, to teach like this reflects English as a real language and thus becomes meaningful and relevant to both students and teachers. (Young, 1997).

## **Learner Training in the EFL Curriculum**

So far we have looked at some basic guidelines for training learners for independence. We must now face harsh reality and ask ourselves some crucial questions: can we use such an approach in our working conditions? Do we and our students have the necessary time and energy? How can we fit learner training into our already crowded EFL curriculum?

In line with the questions above, Mariani (1992) argues that the single principle that is most useful at this stage is the idea that training learners for independence is not a new teaching method - not even, perhaps, a new approach. It is, first and foremost, an attitude - a *willingness to change*. This immediately implies two basic consequences. The first is the fact that autonomy is not confined to any particular age, any particular school or language level, or any particular content or skill. The second consequence is the fact that we need to set priorities and focus on specific teaching-learning situations. We can still play a game of dice - but it must be a problem-oriented game. Our starting point will be our awareness of our students' most urgent problems and needs. Do they need help with listening tasks? with writing compositions? with note-taking? with finding ways of storing and retrieving vocabulary? do they perhaps need to organize their study more efficiently, keep their notebooks tidy or simply be able to keep their diary up to date?

Once we have established *what* we need to do, we must then decide *when* to do it. Mariani must confess that this is a problem which worries her a bit. Does she need to set apart a lesson, a week or even a month to carry out specific learner training sessions? Or can she just add an element of learner training to my everyday classroom work? On the one hand, a series of sessions like the ones she described a few minutes ago does require setting aside some precious class time. On the other hand, specific sessions seem to contradict our basic principle of fully.

### **Integrating Learner Training Into The Efl Curriculum.**

We believe that the answer cannot be a simple one. Of course, most of the tasks that we set in the classroom can be made to include an element of learner training. Training students in the use of a predicting strategy, for example, can be done in the context of ordinary reading tasks - sometimes it is just a question of having a short guided discussion or using a simple questionnaire. In other cases, however, we may find that the issue at stake is so specific, complex and important for our students that it is worth making it the primary objective of a lesson or even a series of lessons. For instance, we may decide that our students would benefit from a specific short course in note-taking techniques. Then the main focus of our sessions will be strategy training, and questions of grammar or vocabulary will, for the moment, remain in the background. In this case, however, we need to make sure that strategy training is not carried out in isolation, that is, we must still closely link it to the actual work that students are required to do in the EFL curriculum. This is necessary if we want our students to maintain the strategies over time, to transfer them across tasks, and eventually, and hopefully, to use them in an autonomous way. (For materials and activities for learner training, cf. e.g. Ellis-Sinclair, 1989; Oxford, 1990; Mariani-O'Malley 1992).

Training learners for independence is basically a willingness to change. Teachers need to promote changes, not just in the learners, but in ourselves as teachers and in our working conditions. That's why, three basic areas will affect teachers in their working as:

1. *Our own awareness, knowledge and skills*: what do we need to be aware of? What do we need to know and to be able to do? What roles do we need to change, and therefore, how will this change the patterns of relationships in the classroom?
2. *The learning tasks that we set*: do they provide our students with an awareness of language and of language learning? Do they give students the chance to plan, monitor and evaluate their performance? Do they offer opportunities to make choices? This includes, for example, a reassessment of the textbooks and

materials we use: to what extent do they help us to carry out a learner training approach? and

3. *Institutional constraints*: we need to identify all the possible ways in which we can promote independence in teaching and learning conditions: for example, ways of managing class time and space in more flexible arrangements, ways of exploiting the media we have or could have available at school, from language laboratories to video facilities and computers; ways of organizing self-access facilities at school or even in our own classroom; ways of "reinventing" homework tasks, so that students can make the most of their time out of school.

### **Integrating Language Content and Learning Process**

According to Nunan (2000:12) the idea of integrating independent learning with the curriculum through learner strategy is by sensitizing learners to the learning process. In his teaching experience, and materials development work, he does it through learner strategy training, e.g. making goals explicit, focusing on learning process, opportunities for reflection, self assessment, the explicit presentation of strategies, giving learner choices, and providing opportunity for individualization.

He further argued that autonomy is to make the learners aware of the goals and content of the curriculum, learning program or pedagogical materials. The next is to involve learners in selecting goals and content from a range of alternatives on offer. Further, along the autonomy continuum, learners would be involved in modifying and adapting goals and content. The next step would see learners creating their own goals and content. Finally, learners are functioning as fully autonomous learners, transcending the classroom and linking content to the world beyond the classroom.

### **Conclusion**

To make the most of the integrating independent learning with the curriculum flexibility, there must be ideas and develop good practice in the general provision of independent learning and its integration with the language curriculum. Integrating independent learning with curriculum as a framework of learner's competency has two advantages. First, it puts a clear emphasis on learning. Second, it is flexible which gives plenty of rooms to learn and to re-learn lifelong. Hence, it must be recognized that the most enduring results of integrating curriculum toward independent language learning are the ability to think, to communicate, to act and to go on self-directed learning which are relevant to the daily lives of all learners.

This means giving up the idea of complete independence as the alternative to complete dependence. Most of us, and most of our students, can be placed somewhere along a line between these two extremes. Some of us and some of students cannot, indeed will not, accept complete autonomy *today* - but, as conditions change and as we and our students change, we could be ready to work for more autonomy tomorrow. Some of us and some of students may choose to be independent for one particular purpose, or under particular circumstances, and this choice, again, can change over time.

Perhaps dependence and independence are not, after all, opposite terms; perhaps we all need to feel autonomous under certain circumstances, but we also need to experience a reassuring feeling of dependence under different circumstances. In other words, dependence and independence may be two complementary and necessary experiences in human development and education. Each individual may need to find a balance which is appropriate to her or his own style of learning or teaching - and this balance is not achieved once and for all, but is an ongoing process of growth.

Above all, promoting learner independence is all about changes and all about choices. It is a process which defies all rigid definitions. Its philosophy is not "all at once or nothing forever more" - rather the

opposite - what is possible today for the people, teachers and learners, that today are going to spend a few hours in a classroom.☑

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