

Self-access Learning :A General Review*

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Abstract

The paper addresses both teachers of English as a foreign language and staff of the specialists departments at universities. It attempts to draw the attention to the importance of self-access learning as an excellent complement to classroom teaching. The paper begins with identifying the context and implications of self-instruction. Following that, the reasons that necessitate the application of self-access are clearly stated. The paper also points to the expected obstacles when introducing 'self-access' in the educational system. Finally, it calls for a radical change in teaching and learning English, learners should be independent, initiators and creative. It is hoped that this paper will be of interest and service to both teachers of English and staff of the specialist departments since the general principles of self-instruction are universally applicable.

* This article is the first in a series of papers on self –instruction

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1. The context of self-access:

Rogers (1969) emphasizes that 'the only man who is educated is the man who has learned how to learn'. At first glance, it may appear that providing self-access facilities may arrange for the disposal of teachers. Luckily, this is not true since self-access is assumed to occur in collaboration with classroom learning. In point to fact, self-access complements classroom learning.

Actually, self-access is an attempt to help EFL (English as Foreign Language) teachers with the practicalities of setting up and managing self-study facilities. Extremely important is the fact that the goal of study facilities is to enable learning to take place independently of teaching. In other words, the students are able to choose and exploit self-access material on their own. The material should enable them to assess and correct their own performance. Hence, the students can enjoy the freedom of directing their own learning.

The fact remains that teachers can not learn for their students. The works of leading authorities in self-access for EFL/ESL students confirm that the most successful language strategies are connected with assuming responsibility for one's own learning.

It is wroth stressing that increasing learners independence demands the change in the traditional roles of both teachers and learners. To be more explicit, instead of fostering dependence teachers should encourage learners to be independent. Over the years, it has been noticed that teachers are the only dispensers of knowledge. It would be beneficial, then, if students are encouraged to assume responsibility and be involved in decision- making.

2. Why setting up self-access?

Many reasons can offer themselves voluntarily to justify why self-access learning is of vital importance to learners worldwide.

To begin with, educator may hold the view that life is a continuing process of education and life itself is rapidly changing. This fact demands a radical change in order to intensively equip people with the tools for undertaking their own learning. People themselves should be aware of the fact that no knowledge is secure. It is only the process of seeking knowledge that can be considered as a basis of security. In addition, humans need to keep abreast of development either in their education or their profession.

Generally speaking, self-access learning is a practical solution to many language problems. Instances of these problems are as follows:

- a) Mixed ability classes.
- b) Students with different backgrounds and needs.
- C) Psychological and personality differences etc.

In reality, the evidence for the existence of psychological, personality and motivational differences between students is very great and puzzling. This perhaps provides one of the strongest reasons for introducing some individualized measure of individualizing instruction to cater for these differences.

One of the most important reasons for introducing self-access learning is that most teachers know very well that students differ in the order that they acquire the language. It is observed that even in a class where all the individuals have had the same dose of learning from the beginning, there will be differences in what has sorts been acquired. This, inevitably, leads

learners to make different sorts of errors. It becomes necessary, then, a teacher should have the capacity for specific diagnosis of students errors. This specific capacity should be directed towards the students and his/her error i.e. individualised learning.

Moreover, individuals also differ in their study habits, in their likes or dislikes of particular learning tasks and activities, in their preferred skills and their general-solving problem strategies. Other differences can be summed up as follows:

- a) Students learn through different media: textbooks, films, games, etc.
- b) They learn through different styles: deductive, inductive, memorization etc.
- c) Students also perform differently in different group arrangement: pair work, small group, peer tutoring.
- d) Students' learning efficiently varies according to time and place of study.

Doubtless all the mentioned-before differences call for strategies for individualized language learning and teaching.

Another point to be considered is that students have different purposes in learning English. They may be learning English in response of their needs of their actual job or future occupation. They may be learning English because they are preparing for public examinations in English. They may be tourists in an English because they are preparing for public examinations in English. They may be tourists in an English-speaking environment or immigrates in an English-speaking culture. All of these are very specific language purposes inevitably involving at least some degree of individualisation.

4. Obstacles to self-access learning:

First and foremost, some problems may be posed by the attitudes and prejudices of teachers and learners. These can be attributed to the fact that teachers have been trained and gained their experience in the traditional mode. Moral teachers should admit that they need their students to need them. Self-instruction can be misunderstood as a conspiracy against teachers self-image i.e. depriving them from parent-like role. Who will chivy students their home work? Who will chase them to arrive punctually?

With regard to students, it can be said that they may favour dependence on their instructors and enjoy letting someone else undertake the responsibility. Regrettably, this is the way the educational system works and what students are used to.

Furthermore, cultural differences may also present serious problems. For instance, independence is not a moral excellence in cures. Some religions regard teachers as people with hidden meaning and spiritual power causing the feeling of awe and wonder. In this way, teachers are respected as unquestionable dispensers of knowledge.

For a minority of teachers and learners, it maybe fruitless to attempt at changing ingrained attitudes. However, through a period of training this minority can accept new roles of methods regarding self-instruction. However, the most tangible problem regarding self-access learning may be attributed to the enormity of the task of setting up self-access facilities and the practical problems that may appear in the long run.

To round off this essay, it should be recommended that attention needs to paid to preparing teachers just as much as students. Training is needed in such fields as student counseling, needs analysis and resource management. Teachers should be involved from the early beginning in the whole process of preparing self-instruction facilities.

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