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## **Learners' Autonomy and Motivation: The Effect of Autonomy Supportive/Controlling Teachers on Students' Motivation**

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**Abstract.** This paper sheds some light on the subject of learners' autonomy from three angles. The first is the relationship between the students' autonomy and their motivation; how high feeling of autonomy elevates their motivation. While, low feeling of autonomy diminishes the students' motivation. The second is the effect of the strategies and techniques that the teachers use to support or to control their students' autonomy on the learners' motivation. Moreover, the impact of the environment created by teachers to support/control the autonomy of the students on their motivation.

**Keywords.** Autonomy, learner, motivation, teacher

It is true that “with freedom comes responsibility.” If you give a person the freedom to take control of his/her own learning, he/she will feel responsible to achieve. The learner will have the opportunity to practice the human need of accomplishment and the desire for knowledge. In fact, the learners' freedom, or autonomy, affect their motivation to learn and the opposite is somehow true. Highly motivated learners probably have high levels of autonomy. Consequently, an autonomous learner is possibly a motivated learner. Above all, if you have a teacher who is a ‘dictator’ and depends on the element of fear and respect of traditional rules in learning, he may not help the students to learn. Therefore, autonomy support/control by teachers influence the students' motivation. This paper sheds some light on the subject from three angles. The first is the relationship between the students' autonomy and their motivation; how high feeling of autonomy elevates their motivation. While, low feeling of autonomy diminishes the students' motivation. The second is the effect of the strategies and techniques that the teachers use to support or to control their students' autonomy on the learners' motivation. Last but not least, the impact of the environment created by teachers to support/control the autonomy of the students on their motivation. The three angles are discussed separately starting with a definition of autonomy.

Autonomy is an important factor in determining the intensity of students' motivation to learn. Autonomy, according to Holec (1981), is the person's capability to grasp the management of his/her learning (cited in Spratt, Humphreys, and Chan, 2002). While, Ryan and Sapp (2007) explain it as the level where the actions of a person are the result of one's self rather than having the act enforced or obliged upon the person. In addition, Deci and Ryan (2000) define it as a

complete act done by the person's will (cited in Lawrence, 2011). Other researchers, as Kohn (1993) claims, connect autonomy with the continuous motive in learning. The self-determination theory, conducted by Ryan and Deci (2000), affirms that autonomy is one of the requirements the human psychology necessitate to increase motivation (cited in Gonzalez, 2011). The self-determination theory, as Ishida (2011) states, recognizes autonomy to be a powerful drive of human motivation. A quite few researches, such as Hackman and Oldham (1976) and Gagne and Deci (2005), identify autonomy as a major drive of intrinsic motivation (cited in Ishida, 2011). In addition, Deci and Ryan (1985) assert that intrinsic motivation is functional when the students' performance is autonomous (cited in Spratt et al., 2002). Patrick, Skinner, and Connell (1993); Zuckerman, Porac, Lathin, Smith, and Deci (1978) prove that a strong sense of autonomy establishes growth in student motivation (cited in Lawrence, 2011). Moreover, the amount of autonomy realization, as Niemiec and Ryan (2009) believe, effects the students' motivation (cited in Lawrence, 2011). According to Dornyei and Csizer's (1998) "ten commandments" for language learning motivation, agree that learners' autonomy leads to motivation (cited in Spratt et al., 2002). Again, Ishida's (2011) research results indicate that additional autonomy nourishes additional motivation. As a result, the learners' autonomy effects their motivation and therefore autonomy is ought to be stimulated, perhaps by teachers.

The strategies and techniques that teachers use to support/control the students' autonomy effect the students' motivation. Supporting autonomy, as Deci and Ryan (2008) explain it, includes a person who frequently and not all the time possesses power. This person interacts with others through the consideration of their point of view, the stimulation of creation, the support of option significance, and the act of having a reply to the individuals' ideas, enquiries, and improvements. While controlling autonomy is usually, expecting the others to perform an action in specific methods and enforcing conditioned attention concerning the others' certain achievement (cited in Milyavskaya, McClure, Ma, Koestner, and Lydon, 2012). Levesque and Pelletier (2003); Ratelle, Baldwin, and Vallerand (2005) assert that providing people with the autonomy support/control by other people effects motivation (cited in Milyavskaya et al., 2012). Furthermore, researches, such as Joussement, Landry, and Koestner (2008), Baard, Deci, and Ryan (2004) and Williams (2006), show that autonomy support/control by another person, for instance, a teacher... is capable of effecting the motivation of an individual (cited in Milyavskaya et al., 2012). In reference to Vansteenkiste, Simons, Lens, Sheldon, and Deci (2004), teachers who use autonomy-supporting techniques find that the students' involvement, attainment, achievement, and endurance are enhanced. On the other hand, Flink, Boggiano, and Barrett (1990) suggest that behavioral control techniques decreases the students' motivation and achievement (cited in Lawrence, 2011). Teachers who aim at rising their students' involvement and motivation are ought to use autonomy supporting strategies in their classroom plan (Lawrence, 2011). However, A quite few teachers go for a dominating strategy, as Niemiec and Ryan (2009) affirm, happen to decrease their students' motives (cited in Lawrence). Reeve (2006) declares that strategies for supporting autonomy applied by teachers, such as avoiding dominating language, giving an explanation for decision, and noticing and accepting students negative utterances, do increase student motivation (cited in Lawrence, 2011). Thus, it is better that teachers use autonomy-support strategies and techniques to increase students' motivation.

Teachers create environments to control or support the autonomy of their students and these environments affect the students' motivation to learn. Autonomy support and control environments created by teachers, as Deci and Ryan (1985) put it, effect the learners' motivation (cited in Cor, 2008). The environment, as Grolnick and Ryan (1989), Ryan and Powelson (1991)

agree, facilitates, or constrains autonomy (cited in Fazey and Fazey, 2001). An environment, in which a student has a choice and heightened expectation, supports autonomy (Baskerville, 2008). Nevertheless, the environment that gives less autonomy support, according to Skinner and Belmont (1993), is a controlled environment (cited in Baskerville, 2008). Vansteenkiste, et al. (2004) emphasize that environments with high autonomy support increase students' involvement and motivations. By comparison, Flink et al. (1990) propose that an environment with high control happen to decrease the students' involvement and motivations (cited in Lawrence, 2011). Deci, Schwartz, Shienman, and Ryan (1981) state that the controlling environment decreases the learner's self-determination and inner motives. While, the autonomy-supporting environment increases his/her self-determination and motives to educate (cited in Cor, 2008). On the same level, three of Vansteenkiste et al. (2004) researches result that learners in environments where the autonomy is supported by teachers have high internal motive in contrast with learners who are in autonomy control environment (cited in Cor, 2008). In addition, Lawrence (2011) conducted a study where he puts two focused groups of students and provides them with two different learning environments. The results indicate that there is, according to the students, a "favorite teacher," and "least favorite" teacher. Lawrence found out that the learners "favorite teacher" is the one that gives an environment with freedom in choosing and has good relation with them. On the other hand, the learners' "least favorite" teacher, according to Lawrence, is the one that is constraining and does not provide much choice to them. Lawrence (2011) reports, "in order to increase student engagement and motivation, teachers may need to 'pull back' and look for ways to hand over some control to students" (p.147). It means that teachers should give their students a control-free environment if they want to have motivated learners. Hence, teachers who create autonomy-supportive environment are more likely to have motivated learners.

To conclude, it is appropriate to say that the learners' autonomy directs their motivation. The learners' achievements and motivation in the process of learning are elevated according to the amount of autonomy given to them. In fact, learners prefer freedom in learning over control. Autonomous learners are motivated learners and vice versa. Essentially, the instructor is the one who can determine and provide the level of autonomy for the learners. Teachers who support autonomy are likely to have motivated students. However, teachers who control the students' autonomy might decrease the motivation of their students. The strategies and techniques used by teachers to support students' autonomy induces their motivation. On the other hand, teachers who use techniques and strategies to control students' autonomy reduce their motive to learn. Furthermore, the kind of environment where the process of learning takes place has a strong impact on the students' motivation. The environment created by teachers to support the students' autonomy nourishes their motivation. Moreover, teachers who build autonomy-controlling environment happen to lower their students' motivation. That is why students usually prefer teachers who give them options and accept their failures and successes. Therefore, the students need autonomy supportive teachers who give them the wheel of control over the process of learning and provide the proper strategies to support their autonomy. Teachers must establish an environment, which supports students' autonomy.

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