



DEPENDENT-INDEPENDENT LEARNER: EXPERIENCES OF A NOVICE INDEPENDENT LEARNER DURING AN MA STUDY IN A UK UNIVERSITY

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Abstract

Purpose of the study: This paper reveals the feelings and experiences of the researcher regarding the transition from a familiar to an unfamiliar context and understanding the concept of 'independent learners and 'independent learning' throughout a one-year MA in the University of Southampton, UK.

Methodology: Written in the form of a narrative by employing a diary, this article presents a brief account (a snapshot) of the researcher's journey, which includes the struggles, gains, and losses during survival as a novice independent learner who had come from a completely different culture and educational setting.

Main findings: The study concludes that training (guiding and facilitating) novice independent learners and developing their metacognitive awareness about 'independent learning' might help in empowering and producing efficient independent learners.

Applications of this study: The paper proposes some useful suggestions for the teachers and educators in learner training, based on and limited to the researcher's observations and experiences.

Novelty/Originality of this study: Based on the theory regarding meta-cognitive awareness and discussing it as a vital part of learner training and the significant role that it plays in dealing with the challenges of independent learning,

Keywords: *Dependent, Independent, Learner, Experiences, Novice.*

INTRODUCTION

This paper presents a brief account (a snapshot) of the researcher's journey: the struggle, gains, and losses during survival as a novice independent learner who, having come from a completely different culture and educational setting, having hardly any clue of the concept, theory, and practice of 'independent learning.' Written in the form of a narrative and concerned with describing and interpreting the researcher's experiences and their possible implications for educators in learner training, the paper explains the journey by outlining a brief theory on the meaning and associated concepts of learner autonomy or independent learning its main features. The following part discusses meta-cognitive awareness as a vital part of learner training and the significant role that it plays in dealing with the challenges of independent learning. Lastly, the paper proposes few suggestions for the teachers and educators based on and limited to the researcher's observations and experiences. This study believes that training (guiding and facilitating) novice independent learners and developing their metacognitive awareness about 'independent learning' might help empower and produce efficient independent learners.

Theoretical Orientation

Learner autonomy and independent learning

The researcher agrees with [Little \(2003\)](#) that learner autonomy is a 'slippery concept' as it is quite difficult to define precisely and is quite open to different interpretations. Though variations on its definition abound ([Benson, 2006](#)), the researcher conceptualizes autonomy as "the ability to take charge of one's learning" ([Holec, 1981, p. 3](#)) and a "capacity-for detachment, decision making and independent action" ([Little, 1991, p. 49](#)). But the capacity to manage one's learning relies on certain underlying psychological capacities ([Benson, 2006](#)). The afore-stated definition by Little explains 'what independent learners can do but does not explain 'how' they can do it ([Benson, 2006](#)). Though terms 'autonomy' and 'independent' are synonymous, the above-mentioned monograph entitled "Dependent-independent learner" seeks to introduce autonomy more like learning on one's own and in isolation which requires a certain level of assistance in planning, conducting, and evaluating learning. So, the researcher prefers the term independent learning for autonomy for a "situation in which a learner studies entirely on his own" ([Benson & Voller, 1997, p. 2](#)). The importance of learning 'how to learn' ([Rogers, 1993](#)) cannot be denied in developing independent learning. For me, independent learning is a "macro skill" made of several "micro-skills" referred to as "'soft skills in active learning': feeling secure in a group, articulation, and the ability to ask questions ([Powell, 2005](#)), accessing and differentiating information; analyzing, synthesizing, applying and evaluating it; understanding the significance of "reflecting and applying critical judgments" ([Powell, 2005](#)). The concept of 'independent learner' involves the extent of involvement and making choices about activities, and 'learning is a social activity in which learners need 'encouragement and direction' ([Powell, 2005](#)).

Main features of independent learners

[Dickinson \(1993, p. 330\)](#) has mentioned the following characteristics of independent/autonomous learners, i.e., they;

- Can identify and pick up what is being taught in their classes, are aware of the teacher's aims, the purpose of the lessons, make these their aims and work on them, and more importantly, see its importance of being done.
- Have the ability to formulate their learning objectives, though not necessarily in competition but collaboration with or in addition to the teacher.
- Are individuals "who can and do, select and implement appropriate learning strategies."
- Can monitor their use of learning strategies.
- Most importantly, they have the potential to identify strategies that are not appropriate and do not work for them and possess the confidence to give up on them and try others from their relatively larger repertoire of strategies.
- And finally, have the quality of self-assessment or monitoring their learning and recognizing its importance.

As some individuals have an inherent ability for language learning ([Wenden & Rubin, 1987](#)) but others struggle to learn, it should not be "..... assumed that learners are able, alone, to set language goals, or to organize their learning, or that even if they know where they want to get to, they know how to get there" which quite indicates the lack of metacognitive awareness, revealing that students have not yet developed the practical 'figure it out' skills to approach the new concept confidently and independently ([Hacker et al., 1998](#)). The 'ability to take responsibility for own learning involves both strategies and confidence ([Dickinson, 1993](#)). Some learners are quite proficient who have succeeded in developing meta-cognitive abilities on their own while progressing in their learning; they know their learning styles and can independently recognize the need of using a range of problem-solving techniques to solve learning difficulties. However, some less proficient learners require focused instruction, encouragement, and practice for developing these abilities ([Joseph, 2009](#)). Less proficient learner misses the internal discourse of meta-cognition, a weakness that prevents him/her from exploring their thought processes ([Joseph, 2009](#)). For troubled students, discussions regarding introspective thinking might lead to anxiety and confusion as they have used to with a dependent and passive approach to learning ([Joseph, 2009](#)). However, "guided instruction and practice over time" can develop effective learning strategies in learners while cutting off the habit of dependency on others for resolving academic problems ([Joseph, 2009](#)). Nunan rightly points out that "some degree of autonomy can be fostered in learners, regardless of the extent to which they are naturally predisposed to the notion" ([Nunan, 1996](#)).

Learner training might help the learners, who possibly think they are habitual failures in learning a language, by enhancing their self-esteem and self-confidence ([Lee, 1998](#)). But, unfortunately, even though meta-cognitive awareness promotes self-regulated learning and greater intellectual maturity, educators do not focus on teaching them ([Lee, 1998](#)). Most classroom instruction focuses on the content, and no time is allotted to teaching strategies used to learn the content ([Lee, 1998](#)).

Learner Training (metacognitive strategies)

"I think of learner training as learning how to learn" ([Dickinson, 1993](#)). [Dickinson \(1993\)](#), once while recounting his experiences of training learner during his teaching career, mentioned that his training involved "encouraging learners to work out their objectives, to think through a range of metacognitive strategies, to plan their learning, to give a time scale to it, to select materials to meet their objectives, and to undertake self-assessment." King Mong kut Institution of Technology in Thonburi has constructed a module in the master's programme on Learner Independence ([Dickinson, 1993](#)). To direct learners' attention on meta-cognitive strategies, [Dickinson \(1993, p. 334\)](#) narrated;

I have developed a framework for which we use the acronym GOAL. It's a checklist of things learners are invited to pay attention to in experiencing a lesson. So, the first letter stands for Goal; in other words, what am I supposed to be learning from this? 'O' stands for Objective. What is the specific objective of the task I am about to do? 'A' is Act. How am I going to do it? What strategy is the best one? Is the obvious one the one I want to use? Are there others? And 'L' stands for Look; in other words, looking at or monitoring the strategy in use and self-assessment. How have I done? Did I do okay?

The Staged Self-Directed Learning Model suggests that learners progress through stages of increasing self-direction ([Grow, 1991](#)). In a study by Taylor, students associated self-directed learning with learning alone excluding teacher's support, for example: 'Just go off and study,' with one student specifying: "The amount of self-direction been too much left to yourself, and it hasn't been supported" ([Taylor, 2001, p. 2](#)). [Little \(1995\)](#) emphasizes the significance of learner training instead of beginning a lecture on the advantages of autonomous learning. I strongly agree with Nunan regarding the need of employing such a scheme (which focuses on HOW, i.e., the learning process) that could enable learners to develop their independence gradually: starting from learner awareness, moving to learner involvement, intervention, creation, and finally ending in transcendence ([Nunan's \(1997\) '5 level scheme'](#)). Researchers have pointed out that focused meta-cognitive instruction enhances practical intelligence and thus enables learners to attain more insight into their learning strategies ([Lambert, 2000](#)), be more mindful of their thoughts, and learn to navigate problems without being frustrated ([Lifford et al., 2000](#)).

Teacher's methods and instruction influence the development of strategic learning through meta-cognitive awareness (Paris & Paris, 2001), which helps learners in developing practical thinking skills to use while doing their learning independently during their course, and later in life (Williams et al., 2002). Where meta-cognitive instruction is part of classroom instruction, less proficient learners make the greatest gains, though these students require the most support (Williams et al., 2002). Meta-cognition is important for understanding how the task is performed (Garner, 1987). Though "meta-cognition is used in a general sense to subsume several individual components, all of these components are intercorrelated" (Schraw & Dennison, 1994), but two components, in general, have been identified by researchers, i.e., "knowledge of cognition and regulation of cognition" (Schraw, 1998, p. 4). The former refers to what an individual generally knows about cognition and includes types of meta-cognitive awareness such as declarative and procedural knowledge (Schraw & Moshman, 1995). Declarative knowledge refers to knowledge "about" things, and procedural knowledge refers to knowledge about "how" to do things, much of which is represented as strategies (Schraw, 1998). Individuals having greater procedural knowledge are more likely to have a long list of techniques, sequencing, and using those strategies effectively in solving problems; thus, they are capable of performing tasks more automatically (Schraw, 1998). While most important regulatory skills are planning, monitoring, and evaluation (Schraw, 1998). A considerable improvement in learning is reported when comprehension of how to utilise these skills is made a part of classroom teaching (Schraw, 1998). Planning refers to selecting appropriate strategies, and monitoring involves one's comprehension and task performance awareness. Monitoring ability develops slowly and improves with practice and training (Delclos & Harrington, 1991). The evaluation suggests appraising the efficiency and products of one's learning, e.g., goals and conclusions (Schraw, 1998). In short, meta-cognition involves regulatory skills and knowledge used to control a person's cognition (Schraw, 1998).

METHODOLOGY

To achieve the above-mentioned objectives, a narrative approach was used whereby the one-year experiences regarding transition into a different culture and educational setup during the MA course in the UK has been narrated in the form of a story and daily reflections of the researcher. The main reason for employing a diary is that "diaries, logs, and journals are important introspective tools in language research" (Nunan, 1992, p. 118) and offers an opportunity to reflect on the processes going on inside the writer's mind, not otherwise accessible to others. Probably the best definition of a diary is the one provided by Bailey (1990), i.e., "A diary [...] is a first-person account of a language learning or teaching experience" (Bailey, 1990, p. 215). Though many interpretations of the term 'diary' exist (e.g., Bailey, 1990; McDonough, 1994; Nunan, 1996), the common element is that it explores "issues not normally accessible through outside observation" (Bailey, 1990, p. 223).

Research Design: Diary

I can best describe 'independent learning,' as it stands for me (a novice), by using a metaphor of "swimmer" who, without having been coached, guided, and trained, have been asked to swim and she/he is propelling himself hard against the pressure of water, looking desperately around for assistance, sometimes succeeded and overwhelmed in making his halfway through the massive body of water, but most of the times hopeless and disappointed, struggling madly for his survival. Very much like section "a" of the below-mentioned figure by Toogood (2005) while aspiring for section "b" of the same figure.

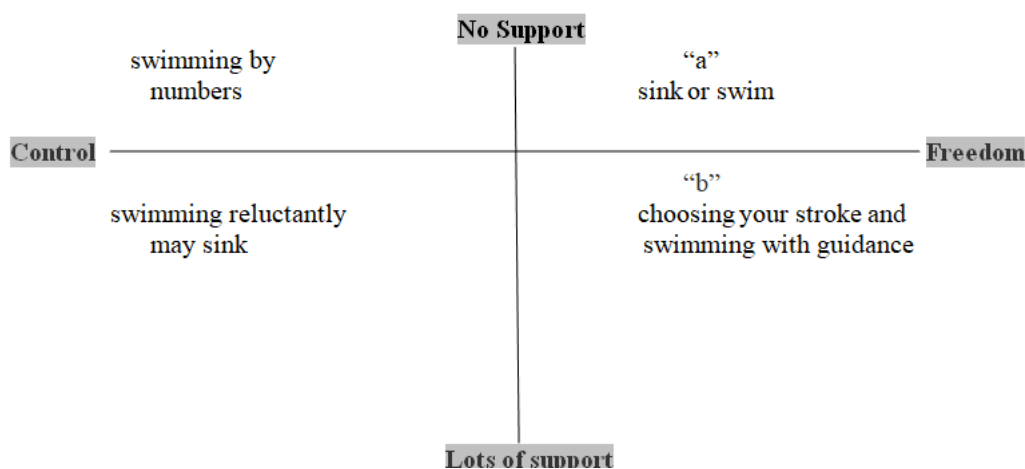


Figure 1: Independent Learning

Source: (Toogood, 2005)

The above analogy of autonomy as a swimmer creates a picture of an 'independent learner' in a "trial and error" situation. Being a visa student, I brought with myself well-established notions of my country's academic culture, which I found inappropriate in the new setting. After I arrived in the UK, having received my first exposure to the British culture

at large and the academic culture, in particular, I found myself disadvantaged as an independent learner (a situation very similar to the one described in appendix A below). Subject to the requirement of this study, I will limit my conversation to the academic environment.

I found this shift of my role, from a highly 'over-dependent to a totally 'independent learner,' very challenging on account of several interconnecting factors which manifested themselves in my learning environment and around which my experiences can be recounted. These are cultural otherness, unfamiliar academic traditions and institutional context, linguistic differences, time management issues, digital incompetence, individual preferences, information overload, and issues with confidence such as willingness to take risks and the fear of failure.

Being an international student in the UK, though, to some extent, I was quite receptive to new ideas; however, I had never given deep consideration to the fact that I would be exposed to a range of new ideas which may be unfamiliar to me. I was quite motivated in the beginning as always perceived myself as very competent in my educational setup but lost my intrinsic motivation to extrinsic de-motivating factors after having been suffered in few things during my endeavour to accommodate myself to the new culture, academic conventions, and institutional settings. This loss of confidence was also reflected in my studies.

Unfamiliar Context

In terms of context, I refer to a country's culture, class setting, academic traditions, and teaching. I belong to a country and culture where females highly rely on their males for their minor routine outdoor tasks and belong to a family where we have a labor system for different tasks. In terms of academic tradition, as opposed to the UK education system, I have throughout my life, from primary level up to under graduation, studied in an institutional setting where students are well pampered and spoon-fed by the teachers at every step of their learning, provided readymade notes and detailed lectures leading to a higher dependency of the learners on the teachers; where relationship building within a group, involving the participation of learners before setting on to the accomplishment of the tasks, is highly valued (which might be quite frustrating for the more task-oriented students).

I am a product of the culture where the teacher is the source and provider of all knowledge and expertise of his/her area, so it is not seen as respectful to question what the teacher said. Though asking clarifying questions is acceptable but raising more controversial questions might be considered as challenging the teacher's authority. So, some students, such as I, are hesitant to put forward and discuss their ideas, not coming from the teacher, specifically where these ideas may seem to challenge those of the teacher's ideas.

Students are mostly used to sitting quietly and just listening to the teacher without, with rare exceptions, any opportunity of participation and ever been asked to express their opinions. Being part of the same academic tradition, I also tend to feel reluctant to get engaged in group discussions and to openly participate in class which is an important part of university education in the UK.

Concerning assessments, just like every student, assessment has been an area of major concern for me as well. I, undoubtedly, desire and try to succeed, but I found methods of assessment in this university quite different and so unfamiliar to me from those of my home country, where the examination system is the main method of assessment for MA students. Most of the time, I found the assignments' assessment criteria, if provided, usually complex that I am unable to understand what is required of me. Secondly, in my academic settings, work receiving a 90% score might commonly be regarded as excellent work, whereas, in the British university system, where 70% often constitutes a "first-class" mark for the same work, was initially de-motivating for me to have put considerable effort and time into a piece of work, only to get what I perceive as a poor mark.

Linguistic issues

I felt myself at a serious disadvantage for not having English as my first language to assess and understand English lectures. Though quite proficient in this language, lacking an 'English ear,' I always found great trouble in comprehension of lectures on account of the complexity of the English accent.

All the above-mentioned factors had a major influence on my new role as an independent learner, and I felt lost in the new environment. I found it quite hard to cope with performing tasks involving independent learning. I found it very shocking to have given just the basic guidance and then expected to tackle and find things out for myself.

When I stepped into the UK a year ago (September 2012), I was under the illusion that every single thing needs to be taught by the tutors. While learning in a different culture from that of the first education and in my endeavour to adapt myself to this new way of learning, most of the time, I found myself alone and was frustrated running after my tutors and colleagues, asking for their time and help and suggestions, being at their disposal for my survival in my academics. The most depressing moments were those when I would not usually get a very good score (according to my expectations) in few assignments despite my great efforts. It was quite hard to fight with so many issues on my head, such as;

- Psychological challenges, such as missing my family and children, adjusting to a new environment.



- Time constraints, such as deadlines, a new way of learning, how to compose assignments effectively within the given time to the tutors' expectations.

Digital incompetence: lacking background of performing every task digitally and not having sufficient technical competence and expertise (Two times I lost my important assignments near the deadline), facing constraints of the digital medium, e.g., software errors, slow downloading, poor access (a very common example of poor accessibility popping up on screen is '**Server Error** We're sorry, but it appears that there has been an internal server error while processing your request. Our engineers have been notified and are working to resolve the issue. Please try again later) and operating digitized resources and library.

- Information overload, such as how to get out the relevant, authentic, and focused material from a massive body of knowledge.
- Confidence issues; such as feeling myself wrong all the time, were so afraid of taking responsibility, not decisive enough to take decisions confidently.
- Personal preferences; such as feeling more comfortable with using print materials as opposed to digital and prefer contiguous (having teacher in my proximity where I feel teachers more accessible and easier to interact), lecture method, and exam system.

During this phase of the struggle, things that helped me and I highly value and appreciate are support by some of my peers sharing their strategies with me and the support and encouragement I received from very few of my tutors especially giving me their precious time to listen to my problems.

Self-reflection

The autobiography mentioned above (section on "Methodology") contains a short retrospective narrative that will make the trajectory of my progression from a highly dependent to a comparatively independent learner understandable.

This narrative contains details of my dilemmas, trial and error experiences, whilst striving for understanding, at times successful but also encountering periodical failures. Initially, I felt myself very well protected, optimistic, and secure relying massively on lectures but soon felt quite intimidated with time being, on the one hand, surrounded by a class of genius types, and on the other spending countless hours in making sense of this new style of learning for me. But of special significance were those few hours of help that I received from some of my gracious tutors and one or two colleagues, which was like a light at the end of a tunnel.

Having fallen into many pitfalls several times and in the light of my experiences (section on "Methodology") as an "independent learner," and to save novice and struggling independent learners a lot of trouble from the onset, I offer some suggestions, in light of the available literature, regarding the development of meta-cognitive strategies and effective independent learning skills, and for the providers of educational opportunities through the courses they offer to facilitate independent learners and promote understanding of 'independent learning.' It might not necessarily equip learners for dealing with all potential situations, but it might be useful in working more effectively, specifically through a transition period.

DISCUSSION AND SUGGESTIONS

Regarding meta-cognitive strategies

Questioning: It encourages learners to take an active role in his/her learning and to build a variety of cognitive processes. Therefore, questioning the need to be open-heartedly allowed and allotted more time rather than neglecting and stifling it to save time and move along the lesson at such a pace that does not usually allow much time for questioning. Generating questions is useful in developing meta-cognitive skills, such as learners interpret, analyze, evaluate, and synthesize the material ([Penticoff, 2002](#); [Ciardiello, 1998](#)), prompting learners to concentrate their learning by directing them to the information they desire to know and assisting them in focusing and organizing their thoughts processes. Instructors need to invoke high-level reasoning/thinking by requiring learners to think of few questions relating to the topic.

Problem-Solving activities: Instructors need to mostly use problem-solving assignments to encourage learners' active engagement with the material. In this way, learners, challenged by the problem-solving activities, learn to identify what they do/do not know, which is a big step towards meta-cognitive awareness ([Joseph, 2009](#)).

Practicing meta-cognitive strategies: Teachers should construct such assignments which could motivate learners to practice new learning techniques in an encouraging classroom environment, developing their confidence and competence as learners, e.g., direct instruction through tutor's modeling, active classroom practice, and discussions about meta-cognition ([Vacca, 2002](#)). Mostly, teachers tend to discuss and model their cognition (i.e., how to perform a task) without modeling meta-cognition (i.e., how they think about and monitor their performance) ([Joseph, 2009](#)). Teachers should promote metacognitive awareness by modeling meta-cognitive skills for their learners; the more explicit the modeling, the more likely learners are to develop meta-cognitive abilities ([Butler & Winne, 1995](#)). It offers learners the opportunity to get insights into how experts approach, think, and make attempts to solve problems ([Schraw, 1998](#)).

Building meta-cognition: Regular opportunities for reflection, especially on an individual's failures and successes (Kuhn et al., 1992) and extended practice, which plays a vital part in building meta-cognitive knowledge (Schraw, 1998), should be provided. Teachers should discuss the significance of meta-cognitive knowledge and the part it performs in self-regulated learning (Schraw, 1998). In order to deal with the learners' feelings about others being more skillful, teachers should make it clear to them that successful learning is developed through concentration, practice, and effort and that learners benefit more from thinking about their thinking (Schraw, 1998). Teachers should know how learners see themselves as learners and should try to comprehend the way they deal with academic challenges (Joseph, 2009). They should work with learners through every step of grasping new meta-cognitive strategies (Joseph, 2009). Teachers should discuss effective thinking strategies and create opportunities for collaborative problem solving and discussion of learners' approaches.

Meta-cognitive strategies: Teachers should consider what strategies and skills are crucial within the particular area taught by them, how they built them, and how to teach their students how to effectively use these skills effectively? Can they tell their students about using these skills intelligently? Using RCs and SEMs (see appendix B & C) are useful in promoting knowledge regarding individual strategies, along with meta-cognitive knowledge regarding the use of those strategies. (Schraw, 1998).

Thinking Strategies: Teachers should model thinking strategies (such as the think-aloud technique) when working with learners on problem-solving activities, thus providing behind the scene thinking needed for good comprehension unfamiliar to many students. Also, they should ask learners to think aloud during the activities and provide comments and feedback on the thinking strategies used by the learners while working through the activities (Joseph, 2009).

Teachers should mentally prepare learners that problem-solving activities are not usually a simple process, and they are very likely to confront confusion and frustration. They should also explain to them that their role as meta-cognitively aware students is to figure out ways to resolve the issues and be successful by developing and applying comprehension strategies (Joseph, 2009). It has been noticed that teacher's modeling and pausing for explanations leads to positive results. The demonstration slows down the activity process learners are engaged in, gives them time for reflection on their thinking, and encourages comprehension of independent learning techniques (Schoenbach et al., 2003).

Self-Assessment: Tutors should foster continuous self-assessment, a vital part of meta-cognitive awareness, thus allowing learners to be aware of their progress. For example, checklists (appendix B) and skills inventories could be useful self-assessment tools (Joseph, 2009). For instance, using self-assessment checklists to facilitate meta-cognitive development, as such exercises might motivate learners to think upon their learning processes (Paris & Paris, 2001). (See appendix B)

Regarding facilitating general independent learning skills

The learning skills of the less able individuals can be developed and refined by following some of the following suggestions. There is no clear correspondence between one issue and one solution. All of them are quite overlapping and must be seen as a whole context of issues and strategies of dealing with them. However, some of these suggestions are linked to the experiences in the diary (section titled "Methodology" above) as examples through similar corresponding numbers highlighted with the bold font (both in this section and section in the "Methodology" above).

- Induction sessions regarding "what is independent learning," "how is it practised," and "skills and strategies" should be arranged, especially by universities catering to international students as it is very likely that all students might not be familiar with this concept such as myself.
- Teachers should be aware that some learners might require practice to be confident in stating and sharing their own opinions and ideas in front of others. e.g., see above section titled "unfamiliar context" second paragraph.
- Instructors should organize group discussions with great sensitivity and care if every student is required to participate and be engaged in them actively. e.g., see above section titled "unfamiliar context" third paragraph.
- Students, especially international students, must be provided with a clear understanding of assessment methods and a clear idea of progress measurement criteria from the beginning and, if possible, opportunities to have a little practice and receive feedback. e.g., see above section titled "unfamiliar context" fourth paragraph.
- Instructors should give students clear written guidance on the assessment criteria and examples of bad and good pieces of written work. e.g., see above section titled "unfamiliar context" fourth paragraph.
- Not only are students given guidance in assignment techniques which is a major assessment method in MA in UK universities, but also sufficient practice in the effective use of those techniques. Also important is to ensure that students clearly understand what is required for achieving good marks. However, it would be rather more appropriate to grant extra time, if possible, to those students for whom English is their second language and who feel reluctant to bring their issues forth and get them discussed. e.g., see above section titled "linguistic issues" paragraph one.
- Learners should be provided with an independent learning toolkit to facilitate independent and interdependent learning.



- In the case of international students, tutors should develop an awareness of cultural, academic, and institutional differences and demonstrate that awareness to international students. <http://staffcentral.brighton.ac.uk/clt/international/1.1Impact.html>
- Create an appropriate level of a supportive environment, especially for students passing through a transition period, in which independent learners can develop new skills.
- All learners might not be assumed as competent, independent learners; rather, teaching styles and strategies ought to be adapted catering to different levels of independent learners so that all learners might be benefitted equally, e.g., see the above section titled "unfamiliar context" first paragraph.
- Provide extra encouragement to international students to make them feel themselves as equally important members of a learning community. Each of them has significant contributions to make. Each individual learner is valued regardless of his/her cultural background.
- Internationalizing the content of university courses so that international students might feel involved and avoid culture-specific course content is likely to isolate international students. <http://staffcentral.brighton.ac.uk/clt/international/1.1Impact.html>
- Keeping regular communication with less confident independent learners encouraging them to communicate openly with teachers, e.g., see above section titled "linguistic issues" paragraph three.
- Ascertaining whether curricular and other related activities offer sufficient opportunities for the development of independent skills. For example, LING 6008 in University of Southampton.
- Observing learners and leading to decisions and awareness regarding what specific skills individual learners already have in independent learning and what abilities learners may require assimilating to increase their skills further, and places where they need to put more effort.
- Teachers need to assist learners in acquiring the knowledge, understanding, and skills and arrange opportunities through which they could show, apply, and practice such skills. This might need to take into account procedures and strategies to create flexibility to deliver the syllabus via a multiple yet balanced range of instructional methods (such as didactic, experiential, and active). ([Teaching Expertise, 2004](#))
- Helping learners in breaking big tasks into manageable steps. Teaching should meet the requirements of all learning styles (e.g., visual, kinaesthetic, auditory, theoretical, reflective, and active) ([Teaching Expertise, 2004](#)). See the above section titled "linguistic issues" paragraph three.
- Making sufficient resources and quality materials available (e.g., videos, CDs, tapes, software) that can facilitate independent learning—for example, the Language Resource Centre at the University of Southampton.
- Ensuring that existing resources and materials should be sufficiently varied and differentiated to meet learner needs, that they are accessible and readily available to those who require them, and that learners have the required skills in order to make full use of the available resources and materials and those who do not possess them should be provided sufficient training ([Teaching Expertise, 2004](#)), e.g., see above section titled "linguistic issues" paragraph three.
- Some tolerance for international students as they might take a little longer in engaging effectively in independent learning than their peers since they are negotiating unfamiliar systems and rely heavily on their tutors for feedback and suggestions for improvement ([Teaching Expertise, 2004](#)), e.g., see above section titled "linguistic issues" paragraph two and four.
- Some learners may experience problems in their studies. In such cases, early identification of the problematic areas is necessary for taking corrective action, e.g., whether the learner's level of English is inhibiting him/her from making progress in his/her studies to provide additional language support or arranging personal tutorials such as Language support classes in the University of Southampton.

CONCLUSION

This paper explored independent learning, which emerged as an issue for the researcher in her transitional phase, and the challenges she confronted in this struggle of familiarising and adjusting herself with the unknown. This narrative article also led to some useful insights regarding independent learning skills, specifically meta-cognitive strategies, which are significant for successful learning. It enables learners to manage their cognitive skills. Meta-cognitive development commences with creating awareness in a learner that meta-cognition exists, is different than cognition, and enhances academic success ([Schraw, 1998](#)). Then teaching strategies were suggested, particularly helping learners to build explicit knowledge regarding where and when to utilise techniques followed by using a flexible repertoire of strategies which could enable learners "to plan, monitor, and evaluate their learning" ([Schraw, 1998](#)). Such objectives can be achieved via a wide range of teaching practices. Integrating thinking strategies into daily classroom activities bring good results by better understanding how successful learning occurs. Teaching learners monitoring cognitive processes by developing



techniques for reflecting, understanding, and remembering is a priceless future investment (Taylor, 2001). Secondly, it emerges that students' experience of the new concept might be in a condition of consistent change, which evolves between the start and the end of the academic course via "cycles of bafflement and empowerment" (Spiro et al., 2012), finally suggesting a range of techniques for learners for coping with such a phase of "transitional independence" (Spiro et al., 2012) and that might inform the education providers to review their educational practices from the perspectives of students negotiating an alien culture in general and academic practices and concepts in particular.

LIMITATION AND STUDY FORWARD

Independent learning is a very broad concept, and since the aim of this paper was not to engage in an elaborate and extensive literature on the subject of independent learning, so it is touched upon only as much as is required for the purpose of this paper. Moreover, this study narrates the experiences of only one individual. More case studies on the topic of this article will be fruitful to the relevant stakeholders both for policy and practice in any given context. Furthermore, cross-cultural comparative research studies also seem to yield interesting findings.

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DECLARATION OF COMPETING INTEREST

None.

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The conception and design of the article were presented by Mahrukh Shakir. Critical revision of the article for important intellectual content was done by Waqar Ahmad.

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Appendix A

<http://www.teachingexpertise.com/articles/encouraging-independent-learning-657> (This blog is taken as it is from the source referred to)

Encouraging independent learning



You may have heard the saying, 'Give a man grain, and he will feed his family for a week. Give him the tools, and he will feed his family for life'. "In the context of education, how much of our time in school is spent aiming at providing grain, and how much at providing learning tools that will serve the person for life?"

The classroom is buzzing. All pupils look happy enough, and all are very comfortable with what they are doing, apart from one. He is slouched, arms folded, with his chin pushed into his chest, and slumped so far down under the table that he looks like a tope balanced on the back of a chair from behind. As I approach, trying to spot a sliver of the face between the jumper and fringe, I ask the question: 'What's the matter, Craig?' The reply is emphatic, if not a little predictable: 'I'm stuck!'

In true educational video style, let's pause the video there and analyze this scene with two questions. Firstly: Why is Craig stuck? His answer would probably be along the lines of 'I'm thick,' but the reality is that he is in a position where he is facing something new, different, or challenging. In other words, he has pushed himself to an existing point: he is about to learn. He should be celebrating.

This leads us to a second question: Why aren't the other children stuck? There are two possible answers here. The first is that they would be stuck but have become skilled at avoiding the challenge. Like Craig, they are afraid of getting stuck, however unlike Craig, they have learned how to manage the situation, so they stay well within their comfort zone, repeating familiar tasks or rehearsing well-used strategies. In other words, they are not actually learning anything new. The second possibility is that they are truly independent in their learning. They can face challenges by making choices about their use of physical and mental resources and, in so doing, scaffold a route from the level at which they are stuck to the next one.

So, how can we create a classroom environment in which getting stuck is celebrated as the gateway to new learning?"

Appendix B: A regulatory checklist (RC) (Schraw, 2009)

Planning

1. "What is the nature of the task?"
2. What is my goal?"
3. What kind of information and strategies do I need?"
4. How much time and resources will I need?"

Monitoring

1. Do I have a clear understanding of what I am doing?"
2. Does the task make sense?"
3. Am I reaching my goals?"
4. Do I need to make changes?"

Evaluating

1. Have I reached my goal?"
2. What worked?"
3. What didn't work?"
4. Would I do things differently next time?"

Appendix C: A strategy evaluation matrix (SEM) (Schraw, 1998)

Strategy How to Use When to Use Why to Use

"Skim Search for headings, Prior to reading an Provides conceptual

highlighted words, extended text overview, helps to previews, summaries focus one's attention

Slow down Stop, read, and think When information seems Enhances focus of about information especially important one's attention

Activate Pause and think about Prior to reading or an Makes new information prior what you already know. unfamiliar task easier to learn and knowledge Ask what you don't know remember



Mental Relate main ideas. Use When learning complex Reduces memory load.

these to construct a information or a deeper Promotes deeper level

theme or conclusion. understanding is needed of understanding

Diagrams Identify main ideas, connect When there is a lot of Helps identify main

them, list supporting details interrelated factual info ideas, organize them

under main ideas, connect into categories.

supporting details Reduces memory load”