Book Review: Learner autonomy: English language teachers' beliefs and practices

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Borg, S., & Al-Busaidi, S. (2012). Learner autonomy: English language teachers' beliefs and practices. London: The British Council.

The book presented below is called: "Learner autonomy: English Language Teachers' Beliefs and Practices" It was written by Simon Borg and Saleh Al-Busaidi, in 2012. The book has 45 pages and it is a research paper carried out in Sultan Qaboos University in Oman. The British Council published the project and it is available online at www.britishcouncil.org.

Learner autonomy: English language teachers' beliefs and practices was developed with language teachers in mind, and the necessity to have the knowledge about what teachers believe in relation with the learners' autonomy; particularly in these days that education has been changing. It seems the authors were also concerned with students. This project tried to promote, more concisely, the autonomy among the language students of the Sultan Qaboos University, located in Oman. The university employs around 200 teachers from all over the world, which means, that there are more than 25 nationalities involved. This center provides education for about 3500 students who are willing to be prepared for undergraduate studies at the university.

The authors; Simon Borg from the School of Education, University of Leeds has been involved in education in TESOL developing for the last 24 years, as a teacher, educator, and as a researcher. He is currently a leader researcher for language education in the University of Leeds, focusing mainly in language teacher cognition. Saleh Salim Al-Busaidi works at the Language Centre, Sultan Qaboos University and has taught English as a Foreign Language for about 17 years. He currently works as a

assistant professor of EFL and performs as Director of the Language Centre at Sultan Qaboos University in Oman. Most of Saleh's researches focuses in learners autonomy, curriculum design and academy readiness.

The internal structure of the project provides a theoretical background of learner autonomy, where the authors provide an analysis about the main issues for the student to achieve an independency in their studies, basing the information in previous researches. They point a number of keys and interlinked themes that are related with the learner autonomy such as: the role of the teacher, the cultural context, the perspectives of the learner, and the facilitation of autonomy among the students. They claim to not have the intention to explain each theme in detail, but just to mention the different aspects involved in the theme. (p. 4) The authors also explain about the teachers' beliefs in the theme of learners' autonomy, claiming that "only few studies addressing language teachers' beliefs about learner autonomy were available" (p. 6) With the theoretical information, they establish that it is very important to know about teachers' beliefs, specially for two reasons; first, teachers' beliefs are able to shape what they do and, they have the ability to contribute with learning opportunities that learners are involved in.

The authors provide with contextual information about the center where the research was made. They describe the center as an institute that teaches approximately 2500 students who need to receive their English studies to attend University. The institute provides courses that are taught in a range of six levels from beginner to upper intermediate level. (p. 8). It also mentions that one of the purposes of this center is to show the students different skills and techniques for them to be independent in their studies, later on in their careers; they all are going to need those skills to have the autonomy to learn. (p.8)

Borg and Al-Busaidi's use to main methodological procedures for data collecting; those were a questionnaire and interviews. And to achieve it, they went into different stages to develop the appendix with valuable information; first, they review different literature about learner autonomy, and draw different topics that could be useful for the research. (p. 9). They drafted the questionnaire, reviewed it and pilot it. For the piloting the authors had help from some colleagues who were working as teachers at an English Language Center located in Turkey. The center presented some similarities with the Sultan Qaboos University. For the piloting, 18 teachers were asked to complete the pilot questionnaire, and after the results, the researchers prepared for the final version, where the population involved consisted of 200 English teachers working at the Sultan Qaboos University. (p. 11)

In the results, Borg and Al-Busaidi present the information obtained from the interviews and the questionnaires. They analyzed each question meticulously, describing mainly that while for some teachers learner autonomy means "freedom to develop their own style" for others it means "giving independence to students" or "to not depend exclusively on the teacher" (p. 14). In the other hand, the

results also showed that 92 % of the teachers agreed that learner autonomy has a positive effect when it comes to learning a second language effectively. Teachers also coincide that involving students with decision making was seen to be most feasible in relation to materials, topics and activities (p. 15). Moreover, it was interesting for the authors the opinion the teachers have about their students' independency, because the majority stated that students were not autonomous (p.17). According to the results, only 10 % of the teachers disagreed to promote autonomy and 79.6 % claimed to encourage it (p. 18).Talking about the challenges that teachers face to help their students to become autonomous, they mentioned: the limited space in the curriculum, the lack of incentive, learner reliance in the teacher, and teachers' limited expectations in learners' abilities (p.19).

In chapter seven they present professional development materials, in which the authors give teachers the opportunities to explore and share their ideas and understandings about learners' autonomy based in the results of the questionnaires and interviews. The project also provides a section that the authors called "workshop" where, they give advises, and promote different strategies to implement with the students, such as sharing ideas among teachers about the meaning of autonomy, that way, they all would complement each other, and they will expand their views about the topic, to create groups in which teachers would be able to explore, and to develop strong basis for students' autonomy (p. 23).

This project shows the importance of teachers knowing what independency is, and the way they teach their students to become autonomous learners; expecting that students would be more likely to know how to be independent in their studies, specially nowadays that education has been changing its views about teaching methodology and we need competent students, who are able to construct their own knowledge. After this research, we realize the importance of the teacher guiding them to a new horizon where independence is vital to succeed as a student, professional and as an individual in a changing society.