A quantitative method study on Finch (2006)'s taxonomy in investigating students' autonomy in modernism and postmodernism concepts: Which one promotes students' autonomy in classroom?

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Abstract

Promoting learner autonomy is considered as a vital concern to EFL learners, so far much attempt, and related to develop learner autonomy in various concepts. The present study aimed at examining the effect of Postmodernism and Modernism concepts on EFL learners. This study carried out in the course of study at high school in Iran. Accordingly, 60 learners, between 16 and 17 years old, randomly chosen from a larger participants of 80 EFL learners with respect to their achievement on Oxford Placement Test (OPT), attending high school in Iran. The selected participants have been assigned into two groups (i.e., postmodernism and modernism concepts, respectively). Each group involved 30 participants. Control group (n=30) usual teaching through *modernism concepts*, whereas experimental group (n=30) is exposed to *postmodernism concepts*. Over the course of this present study, the data was gathered through a pre-test, and post-test of learner autonomy questionnaire. The t-test statistical procedure utilized to the research question. The findings of the result showed that postmodernism concepts significantly performed better than the modernism concepts group in the learner autonomy. The results of this study showed that all those who are engaged in language teaching and learning can process to possess a better perspective into developing efficient instructions.

Keywords: autonomy, learners' autonomy, postmodernism concept, modernism concept, Finch (2006)'s taxonomy

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1. Introduction

Over the last decades, postmodernism has regarded an important notion to be discussed. There are various famous scholars and researchers who have been spilled against postmodern ideology. For example; Kirby (2006) considers the postmodernism world as a type of pseudo-modernism—a return to the existence of modernity, but without its quality. To Kirby (2006), postmodernism is dead and buried. In this regard, Chomsky (1996) claims that postmodernism is without meaning, since it does not add anything to our analytical or empirical knowledge. According to Chomsky (1996), postmodernists are charlatans. Chomsky (1996) also mentions that postmodernism will have significant and positive impacts on the third world. Chomsky (1996) also believes that the third world requires serious intellectuals to take part in the existing struggles instead of ranting about postmodern absurdities. In addition, Guattari (1984, as cited in Bazargani & Larsari, 2015) claims that postmodernist visions of the world were not flexible enough to look for explanations in psychological, social, and environmental backgrounds at the same time. In sum, to the critics of postmodernism, it "covers an ill-defined galaxy of ideas—ranging from art and architecture to the social sciences and philosophy" (Sokal & Bricmont, 1998, p. 182). On the other word, learning a foreign language independently and autonomously has attracted the attention of great number of teachers and educators for many years. There are many variables for an autonomous learning; however, willingness and taking responsibility for the learning tasks are the two factors of an autonomous learning (Salimi & Nowrozi larsari, 2015).

Daunwong (2007) states that, these two factors are dealt with metacognitive knowledge and metacognitive experiences. He points out to Fleming and Walls (1998), who claim that metacognitive knowledge helps learners to have the ability to plan, monitor, manage and reflect on the process of language. Dafei (2007) studied the relationship between autonomy and learning a language and represented that learner autonomy influences students' language proficiency. In educational contexts, the concept of autonomy has got a lot of attention. Indeed, this ability should come true to have better learning. Based on Little (1991), autonomy is "a capacity-for detachment, critical reflection, decision-making, and independent action. The capacity for autonomy will be displayed both in the way the learner learns and in the way he or she transfers what has been learned to wider contexts" (p. 4). To show different features of the autonomous learner in the process of language learning, it is important to study different definitions and aspects of learner autonomy (Norouzi larsari, 2011). The first definition presented by Holec is "the ability to take charge of one's own learning" (as cited in little, 2006, p. 1). As Benson (1997) states, autonomy may be used in five different settings. First, autonomy is used in conditions where learners study on their own. The second condition is for those skills and capacities that may be utilized in self-directed learning, and the third setting is for a natural ability which is forbidden by institutional education. The next condition is enhancing responsibility of learning on their own, and the last one is for the right of learners to recognize the orientation of their own learning and ability to assess their performance. Little (1991) felt that "learner autonomy does not mean that the teacher becomes redundant, abdicating his/her control over what is transpiring in the language learning process" (p. 4). The aim of the empirical research paper is to investigate whether modernism and postmodernism concepts to EFL learners has any influence on improving their learner autonomy or not. Therefore; the research question is as follows:

RQ1: Is there any significant difference between modernism and postmodernism on improving EFL learner autonomy?

1.1 Significance of the study

According to Savignon (2002), there have occurred great changes in the pedagogical area of foreign language learning and teaching, and the tendency has shifted into grammar translation-orientated method to the present broad interest in more communicative methods of language learning and teaching. The outcomes of this change is the advent of some variables such as autonomy and creativity, self-regulation which have attained much attention. The ideal notion of the autonomous learner requires a change in taking responsibilities for the learner. In this respect, autonomous learners can show their own learning, identify their objectives, monitor their improvement, and assess and select required materials. A better understanding of autonomy and its effects on language knowledge and learners' success, on their academic studies in general and their language learning process in specific, can help language instructors and curriculum developers to find and present new ways of improving these characteristics and help the learners reach their main language learning objectives. Getting the best use of these implicit qualities can be so rewarding and helpful for learners on their way to reach the ultimate success. There is widely belief that the Iranians, as many Asian nationalities (Nakata, 2011), are experiencing the transition age form traditional culture that favors judicious mind to modern era when creativity and self-reliance are receiving their deserved credit. Nakata (2011) cites Esaki's (2002) statement that learners in such a transit move from being taught with a focus on memorization and remembering to self-teaching through questioning, considering, searching and doing. Iran, as does Japan for instance, has its culture rooted in collectivist basis where people see themselves primarily as group members with strong group loyalty and interdependence. As Holliday (2007, p. 20) maintains, for the collectivists "silence is virtue, face is derived from the group where members are satisfied with very few choices." Nakata (2011) maintains that, success in such a situation is the extent to which personal autonomy is achieved because it is the key to motivation and motivation is a grand driving force for creative performance.

Farahani (2014), with a 405 number of EFL learners in a language institute in Iran, indicated Iranian EFL learners' readiness for autonomous learning. She conducted semi-structured interviews, distributed questionnaires and observed a number of classrooms to scrutinize the perceptions of learners about their readiness for autonomy. The results of her study indicated a gap between learners' perceptions of autonomous learning and their actual classroom practices. However, in this study researcher has attempted to apply efficient strategies for improve language institutes curriculum and language instructors and learners reach the highest language knowledge level.

2. Review of Related Literature

2.1 Definition of autonomy

Many researchers tried to define the term of "*autonomy*" from various aspects. In educational context, researchers have different opinions on autonomy (Zareai, 2009). For example; according to Richards and Schmidt (2002), autonomy is the principle which the learners should assume a range of responsibility for what they learn and how they learn. Zareai (2009) maintains that the term "*autonomy*" and "*learner autonomy*" are an intimate and familiar word within the context of language learning and teaching. The dictionary meaning of autonomy is "the ability to act and make decisions without being controlled by anyone else" (as Cited in, Zareai, 2009, p. 2). Several terms are often used to refer to the autonomy of the language learner: Self-management, self-learning, individualization, self-instruction, learning consciousness, learner-centeredness, learner independence, learning how to learn and independent language learning, and learning on an autonomous principle (Holec, 1981). The concept of autonomy has also been associated with the idea of self-sufficient learning, learner instruction, self-determination, interdependence, and individualization. Defining autonomy is very sophisticated; autonomy frequently has multiple different names, for example self-regulatory learning, self-sufficient leaning, the learner-centered approach, and self-governing learning. There have been different interpretations relying on how autonomy is considered (Onozawa, 2010). Besides, the notion of autonomy has

broadly been used in the area of ELT during the last decade. Various expressions such as individualization and then learner independence are more approved in the area of ELT because such terms refer more exactly to the practical interventions or conditions of teach (Smith, 2008). Holec's (1981) seminal work entitled *"Autonomy and foreign language learning"* provided a definition of learner autonomy as the "ability to take charge of one's own learning" (p. 3). He also defined the definition of "*learner autonomy*" as follows:

> *"to have, and to hold the responsibility for all the decisions concerning all aspects of this learning, i.e. determining the objectives; defining the contents and progressions; selecting methods and techniques to be used; monitoring the procedures of acquisition properly speaking (rhythm, time, place, etc.); evaluating what has been acquired"* (Holec, 1981; p. 3).

2.2 Postmodernism

The term *postmodernism* alludes both to the postmodern period and to a set of developments inside that period (primarily in craftsmanship, music, and writing) that responded to innovator propensities (Mary Webster's College Lexicon, 2004). Postmodernism incorporates doubtful basic translations of culture, writing, craftsmanship, logic, history, phonetics, financial matters, design, fiction, women's activist hypothesis, and scholarly feedback. Postmodernism is frequently related with schools of thought such as deconstruction and post-structuralism, and logicians such as Jean-François Lyotard, Jacques Derrida, and Frederic Jameson. Postmodernism incorporates doubtful basic translations of culture, writing, craftsmanship, reasoning, history, phonetics, financial matters, design, fiction, women's activist hypothesis, and scholarly feedback. Postmodernism is regularly related with schools of thought such as deconstruction and poststructuralism, and with rationalists such as Jean-François Lyotard, Jacques Derrida, and Frederic James.

2.3 Empirical Studies

A number of studies have been conducted to investigate the correlation of learner autonomy in second language teaching and learning. In a study, Chan (2000) examined an action research project on ways and methods of developing learner autonomy in an ESL classroom. A sample of 15 first-year university students in a Bachelor of Arts in contemporary English at Hong Kong Polytechnic University was selected. Chan carried out an autonomy-based English program. Students received a detailed explanation of the circumstance and purpose of this program, classroom procedures, and group learning tasks. The study found the degree and quantity to which learner autonomy was performed in the tertiary language classroom.

In another study, Kucuroglu (2000) evaluated the role of a learner-centered approach in language teaching in the promotion of learner autonomy through investigating the values and plan characteristics of a freshman year English course, namely English-2 suggested at Dogus University. The plan of the model course included five focal characteristics: evaluation of learners' requirements, allowing learners' selections in learning, validity and accuracy of textual resources, changing the roles of teachers and learners. This course with the explained features above could get students through the stages of performing academic research, helps them enhance their self-assurance in working on their own, and learning to accept the responsibility for their own learning. As a result, the model course developed learner autonomy with the values of communicative language teaching and learner-centeredness in language education. Wachob (2006) holds that motivation is the focal point to achievement in learning.

In a study conducted by Wachob (2006), the participants of the study included first year students at Nanyang Business School, Singapore, who began their English Proficiency course and described as poor in language skills and less motivated in their study of English. The vital aim of the study was to help students manage their own learning and be more autonomous learners. To this end, the prior methods involving grammar-based, teacher-centered, and with the highlighting on the final exam as well as recourses including standardized American textbooks written for ESL students were changed and modified to develop motivation and autonomy.

It is worth noting that the methodology was also altered to use cooperative learning, learner choice, thoughtful and more active classroom and beyond activities. Additionally, teaching recourses were altered and amended into innovative textbook that applied locally applicable texts and topics related to Business and Accountancy students. The questionnaires of the study included four cohorts of students. They were also thoughtful exercises that folded into the theoretical notions of developing motivation. The obtained results revealed effective responses to alters. The results further indicated that an obvious detach between the aims of students that is better writing and speaking skills, and a desired reading strategy showed a require to clearly teach learner strategies so as to give power to students and make them feel viable.

3. Methodology

3.1 Subjects

The participants of this study are female students from High school in English Language Research Center, Iran with the range of 20 to 25 years old. There are 80 learners in intermediate level who were given an Oxford Quick Placement Test (OQPT) as the homogenization test. Those participants whose scores fell between one standard deviation above and below the mean are selected and they are defined as intermediate EFL learners in this study. The participants are native speakers of Persian. Their level of English language proficiency will be intermediate. Next, 60 participants are selected with respect to their proficiency level. Then, the researcher divided them into two groups. One experimental group and one control group; each group included 30 participants. Control group (n=30) usual teaching through *modernism concepts*, whereas experimental group (n=30) is exposed to *postmodernism concepts*. In addition, this research is conducted in late academic year of 2017 and early 2018.

3.2 Instrumentations

Oxford Quick Placement Test (OQPT): To tap participants' level of English language proficiency level, an Oxford Placement Test (OPT) (2004, Allen) was utilized to homogenize the participants in the study. The Oxford test consists of three parts. The test has 60 items and a writing part. Due to administration problems, the writing section will be excluded. The Oxford Quick Placement Test (OQPT) provides teachers with a reliable and efficient means of placing students at the start of a course. The tests will be calibrated against the levels system provided by the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment (commonly known as the CEF), which has been adopted by the Association of Language Testers in Europe (ALTE) and by governments and major institutions, including exam boards, throughout Europe. In addition, the OQPTs can clearly and reliably identify any learner's CEF level (on the A1 to C2 CEF scale) and also provide a score which shows where the learner is within that band, e.g. near the top of B1. They can also discriminate at levels above and below the CEF scale.

Learner Autonomy Questionnaire: The questionnaire was administrated by Deng Dafei, in a study titled "An Exploration of the Relationship between Learner Autonomy and English Proficiency" (2007). The questionnaire was originally designed and developed by Zhang & Li (2004, p. 23), which includes 21 items. It includes two sections. One section includes 11 items through a five-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (Never) to 5 (Always), and the other section is 10 items with multiple-choice format. The aim of the autonomy questionnaire is to assess learners' autonomy after the administration of OQPT test.

3.3 Data Collection Procedure

Over the course of this present study, the data was collected through a pre-test, and post-test of learner autonomy questionnaire. The length of the study was 14 sessions of 90 minutes twice a week in which the 10th session devoted to mid-term exam and the last session to final exam. Therefore, the participants in each group received 18 sessions of instruction.

At the beginning of the study, 80 learners of intermediate level at High School in English Language Research Center, Iran will be selected through non-random selection. Then, the Oxford Quick Placement Test (OQPT) administered to homogenize the participants with respect to their overall language proficiency. Next, 60 participants whose scores fell between one standard deviation above and below the mean, are selected. Then, they are randomly divided into two groups. One experimental group and one control group; each group included 30 participants. Control group (n=30) usual teaching through modernism concepts, whereas experimental group (n=30) is exposed to post-modernism concepts.

Also, before administering the learner autonomy questionnaire, participants were informed that filling the learner autonomy questionnaire is completely optional and convinced that the purpose, and process of completing the questionnaire. The participants are assured that the results of their responses to questionnaire is going to be used just for research purposes and they can receive the results of their personality trait in each questionnaire. Then, ambiguities and misunderstanding about the questions were cleared by the researcher, if there was any. Then, the researcher gave a pre-learner autonomy questionnaire to the students before teaching the treatments. The aim of the learner autonomy is to see how autonomous the participants were in learning English as a foreign language. In addition, its aim is to measure their autonomy levels.

From the second session on, the regular class teaching syllabus contained a teaching and practicing section of the concepts of modernism and postmodernism for at least 20 consequent sessions. The control group was worked on modernism via concepts and approaches to modernism; while the experimental group members experience postmodernism concepts. The researcher taught the concepts of modernism and postmodernism for both experimental group and control group. Here was teaching the concepts of modernism and postmodernism as follows (Finch, 2006):

Table 1

Taxonomy of Finch (2006): Modernism and Postmodernism Concepts

Modern metanarratives	Postmodern metanarratives
High-stakes, standardized testing (Concentrate on the product of learning)	Relativistic focus on process; deconstruction of the standardized testing paradigm.
Structural syllabi (Totalization)	Deconstruction of propositional language learning concepts
Teacher-controlled learning (Totalization)	Decentralization, regionalism

At the end of the term, the researcher gave the same learner autonomy questionnaire as a posttest to these groups to see which group of modernist or postmodernist class outperforms another class in terms of autonomy level.

3.4 Data Analysis

The quantitative data was derived from the learner autonomy questionnaire is analyzed using Excel program. Over the course of this present study, the data was collected through a pre-test, and post-test of learner autonomy questionnaire. In order to answer the research questions, the descriptive statistics of frequencies and percentages should be used. Statistics should be used in data analysis is t-test dependent sample to see which group of modernist or postmodernist class outperforms another class in terms of autonomy level. Independent sample t-test will be performed in order to show that whether there is significant difference between postmodernism and learner autonomy groups regarding their performance on posttest.

4. Results and Discussion

This empirical research is to examine the effect of postmodernism and modernism concepts on learners. The data collection was meticulously conducted and the data were entered into SPSS to calculate the statistical analyzes and address the research question and hypothesis of the current research.

4.1 Analysis of the Research Question

To answer the research question, the researcher utilized two independent sample t-tests both for pre-test and for post-test. The related descriptive statistics are given in Table 1.

Descriptive Statistics

Table 4.1

Descriptive statistics of two group's scores on the pre-test of learner autonomy

Group	N	Mean	SD	Skewness	Kurtosis
Postmodernism	30	23.00	4.331	-.126	-.841
Modernism	30	22.10	3.916	-.412	-.503

Table 4.1 indicates that the mean and standard deviation of the postmodernism (Mean = 23.00, *SD* = 4.33) and Modernism (Mean = 22.10, *SD* = 3.91) on pre-test of learner autonomy.

Table 4.2

Independent samples test to compare two groups' scores on learner autonomy pre-test

	Levene's Test for Variances		*T*-test for Means			
Factor	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Diff.
Equal variances assumed	.501	.482	.844	58	.402	.900
Equal variances not assumed			.844	57.421	.402	.900

As it is shown, the results of independent *t*-test demonstrated that there was not any statistically significant difference (*t* (58) = .84, *p* > 0.05) in learner autonomy scores for postmodernism (Mean = 23) and modernism (Mean = 22.10) groups on the pre-test, where the *t* observed was less than the *t* critical of 2.04.

Table 4.3

Descriptive statistics for two group's scores on the post-test of learner autonomy

Group	N	Mean	SD	Skewness	Kurtosis
Postmodernism	30	25.50	4.681	-.065	-1.004
Modernism	30	22.80	4.046	-.470	.045

As shown in Table 4.3, EFL learners in the postmodernism group (Mean = 25.50, *SD* = 4.68) have considerably higher performance than those in the modernism (Mean = 22.80, *SD* = 4.04) on post-test of learner autonomy. Further, the results of independent *t*-test that was performed to compare modernism and postmodernism groups' reading comprehension scores on the post-test are laid out in Table 4.4.

Table 4.4

Independent samples test to compare two groups' scores on learner autonomy post-test

	Levene's Test for Variances		*T*-test for Means			
Factor	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Diff.
Equal variances assumed	1.667	.202	2.390	58	.020	2.700
Equal variances not assumed			2.390	56.810	.020	2.700

Independent *t*-test in Table 4.4 detected a remarkably strong discrepancy (*t (58)* = 2.39, *p*< 0.05) in learner autonomy scores for postmodernism (Mean = 25.50) and modernism (Mean = 22.80) groups on the post-test, where the *t* observed was greater than the *t* critical of 2.04, with the mean difference of 2.70 out of 40. As a result,

it was concluded that postmodernism concepts had remarkably more strong influence over the learner autonomy of EFL learners in comparison to modernism concepts. In this regard, the researcher used a paired sample *t*-test (or matched test) to check the reading comprehension means obtained on pre-test to post-test in each group. Because the two sets of scores did not violate the assumptions of Parametric Analysis in each group, the researcher performed parametric paired sample *t*-test, or not nonparametric Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test was used. The results of this *t*-test has been given in Table 4.5.

Table 4.5

Paired samples test to compare each group's means on the pre-test and post-test of learner autonomy

Group	Mean	*SD*	*T*	*df*	Sig. (2-tailed)	95% Confidence Interval of Difference	
						Lower	Upper
Postmodernism	2.50	4.65	2.94	29	.006	.763	4.237
Modernism	.700	2.27	1.68	29	.103	-.150	1.550

As shown in Table 4.5, Paired samples *t*-test results indicated that there was a statistically significant increase ($t (29) = 2.94$, $p < 0.01$ (two-tailed)) in learner autonomy scores from pre-test ($M = 23$, $SD = 4.33$) to post-test ($M = 25.50$, $SD = 4.68$) in the postmodernism concepts. In fact, the mean increase in learner autonomy scores was 2.50 out of 40. Quite reverse, paired samples *t*-test failed to find any statistically significant increase ($t (29) = 1.68$, $p > 0.05$ (two-tailed)) in learner autonomy scores from pre-test ($M = 22.10$, $SD = 3.91$) to post-test ($M = 22.80$, $SD = 4.04$) in the modernism concepts. Moreover, we found that in comparison to modernism, postmodernism concepts had a much stronger influence on the students' autonomy of Iranian EFL learners.

5. Conclusion

With respect to the interpretation of the results, the researcher now turns to the conclusion he has come up with, and regards what EFL teachers should actually do to facilitate their learners' learner autonomy (Norouzi larsari, 2021). To sum up, this research argues that learner autonomy is the most important concept inside the classroom, because it has a great role in improving the learners' language knowledge, motivation, and self-efficacy. On the other hand, applying learner autonomy helps students to feel more confident to formulate their own findings. In addition, the researcher designated a better understanding of autonomy and its effects on language knowledge and learners' success, on their academic studies in general and their language learning process in specific, can help language instructors and curriculum developers to find and present new ways of promoting these traits and help the learners reach their main language learning objectives. Getting the best use of these implicit qualities can be so rewarding and helpful for learners on their way to reach the ultimate success. Moreover, the autonomy has the following advantages:

➢ It leads to gaining a sense of responsibility (Richards & Schnidt, 2002).

➢ Autonomy improves learner's self-direction and his/her progress in the classroom (Nedzinskatie el al, 2006).

➢ Autonomy also brings independency in the individuals (Birjandi & Tamjid, 2011).

5.1 Pedagogical implications

It is hoped that findings of this study motivate teachers to apply cognitive strategies in language teaching and enhance the learners' attitude regarding the use of these strategies in the classroom. This study might support teachers by encouraging the use of surveys to determine what motivates and reaches each student in the classroom through brainstorming and outlining while improving writing performance. Teachers could then construct lessons to encourage the complete classroom and to include more students without leaving some other students behind. The research sought for ways that can both enhance students' writing skills and build up their

positive perceptions towards learning language. The brainstorming and outlining strategies are chosen to solve students' difficulties in learning English language skills. The research in this study could encourage English teachers to redirect struggling students not only for a class or a semester but also to motivate students to use their cognitive abilities to be successful in their whole life. The research in this study could encourage English teachers to focus on learner autonomy and postmodernism concepts and based on the researcher's own perceptions and observations of students' learning attitudes towards EFL learning such as teacher-dependence and teacher-centered education and lack of self-initiation, the researcher has decided to conduct this study. The purpose of this study is focusing on the degree of autonomy and language learning among learners, reviewing the current theory and practices of fostering learner autonomy and self-initiation in foreign language, and investigating the characteristics of autonomous learners in the English classrooms. At the same time, the present study will examine the possible relationship between autonomy and language proficiency.

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