

A Critical Review on Design Features Required of English Language Teaching Coursebooks to Foster Learner Autonomy

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This paper is aimed at addressing one of the issues still unresolved in the field of English language education: whether English Language Teaching (ELT) coursebooks can function as a tool in promoting language learner autonomy. The premise of the paper is that if characterised by certain design features, ELT coursebooks can offer much potential for the embrace of the concept of learner autonomy. Drawing upon the theoretical strategy of qualitative research aiming to make use of theoretical evidence from secondary sources, the review concluded a series of twenty design features required of ELT coursebooks and their associated tasks to foster learner autonomy such as comprehensibility, variety, sufficiency, flexibility, strategy training, differentiation, authenticity, personalisation, among others. When formulated in a checklist, the series of the twenty design features become a set of criteria that can function as a useful tool in the hands of teachers to evaluate whether a particular series of textbooks has the potential to develop language learner autonomy. Since research undertaken so far on the topic in question is very scant and limited in scope and breadth, this review paper contributes to plugging this gap in the ELT literature.

Keywords: *Autonomy, Coursebooks, Design Features, Language Education, Tasks*

INTRODUCTION

Notwithstanding being the most commonplace and prevalent form of material support in language classrooms, ELT coursebooks have encountered various challenges and criticisms, chief among them the growing acceptance of learner autonomy (Tomlinson, 2017). Learner autonomy is defined by Holec (1981, p. 3) as learners' "ability to assume the responsibility of their own learning after acquiring the knowledge, strategies and skills necessary for self-learning" such as determining learning objectives, materials as well as methods, performing

self-assessment and evaluating learning outcomes (Crabbe, 2007). Several authors hold very conflicting, yet persuasive viewpoints as to the potential of ELT coursebooks to develop language learner autonomy. On the one hand, the advocates of the use of ELT coursebooks claim that if accompanied by supplementary materials, textbooks can provide guidance to self-learning (Harmer, 2001). In parallel, Edge and Wharton (1998, p. 300) state that coursebooks represent a crucial tool for a continuous dialogue and engagement among teachers, students as well as authors, and this in turn facilitates the development of learner autonomy.

At the opposite end of the spectrum would be a number of writers questioning the potential of ELT coursebooks to foster language learner autonomy for practical and technical reasons. First and foremost, the real problem is that the concept of *coursebook* contradicts the philosophy of learner autonomy that is supposed to be mainly drawn on the conviction that all learning is individual. However, most textbook writers tend to develop their textbooks on the illusion that all students anticipated to use their materials will follow the same learning rout, pace, progression as well as strategies and are likely to encounter similar learning problems. As Tomlinson (1998a) states, the majority of coursebooks follow a very tight structure that inhibits learners from developing necessary study skills, techniques and strategies for the embrace of autonomy. Newby (2001) corroborates and asserts that most ELT coursebooks encounter a challenge in relation to learner autonomy due to their limiting of learners' choices and lack of engaging texts, tasks and activities. Benson (2011) makes it more explicit and argues: "commercially produced materials offer very little potential for the embrace of the concept of learner autonomy".

Arguably, these claims made against ELT coursebooks seem rather narrow and lack empirical evidence. First and foremost, language courses are the most likely settings where students on a regular basis come into contact with the notion of autonomy, and by extension ELT coursebooks taught in such courses may help students to think about their learning and this in turn facilitates the development of their autonomy. Nevertheless, it seems very unclear how coursebooks realise this. From the second language acquisition (SLA) perspective, language coursebooks can have a "scaffolding function". In a sense, teachers and students should view and treat texts and activities embedded in coursebooks as guidelines and suggestions. In effect, when carrying out an adequate number of communicative tasks characterised by particular design features, students are anticipated to gain successful learning experience, attain a sufficient level of awareness leading to developing necessary learning strategies and go beyond the coursebook searching for alternative sources of knowledge. This means coursebooks themselves cannot make learners autonomous. However, learner autonomy derives from: carrying out communicative tasks characterised by specific design features, learners' willingness and preparedness to be autonomous, students' awareness of what language learning entails and last but not least, from 'the perception that the possibility of choice exists' (Edge & Wharton, 1998, p. 302).

The review of the relevant literature has demonstrated that research on the subject of the design features required of coursebooks and their associated tasks to foster language learner autonomy is very scant and limited in scope and breadth. As such, this review paper is aimed at plugging this gap. The principal research question raised in this paper is: what are the design features required of ELT coursebooks and their associated tasks to foster learner autonomy?

2. METHODOLOGY

This review paper has drawn upon the theoretical strategy of qualitative research aiming to make use of theoretical evidence from secondary sources in the ELT literature. Thus, the reader has a better view of this paper as a base for further empirical action research-based studies. The framework for the review was comprised of five stages: developing inclusion criteria of the target sources; identifying most relevant and credible sources; subjecting the sources to criticism; synthesising the evidence from the literature, and last but not least, refining and discussing the findings with some practitioners in the field of ELT materials design and evaluation. The review was mainly centred on the issues: the design features required of ELT coursebooks and their associated language tasks to foster language learner autonomy.

3. DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS

3.1 Design features required of ELT coursebooks to foster learner autonomy

From McDonough's (2003) perspective, since "no textbook of a set of materials is likely to be perfect", there are necessarily cases in which the design aspects of coursebooks fail to provide texts and tasks that promote language learner autonomy. This raises an important issue: in what way can ELT coursebooks function as a tool in promoting learner autonomy in the language classroom. In other words, what are the design features required of coursebooks to facilitate the development of learner autonomy? Reviewing the relevant literature has manifested a repertoire of twelve design features required of ELT coursebooks to foster language learner autonomy. It is worth mentioning that the discussion in this section is established on the principles derived from the theory of learner autonomy.

The first feature to be paid close attention to is *clear statements of learning objectives* to help students to know what intended learning outcomes and destinations that they are supposed to reach and to give them the opportunity to evaluate and compare learning outcomes predetermined in a course with their primary impetuses for language learning (Richards, 2001). In order for learning objectives to be clear statements, they need to:

- 1) be in the form of intended learning outcomes through aligning with well-defined learning taxonomies namely Bloom's (1956);

- 2) be SMART “Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic and Time bound” by including five essential components: Subject, Performance, Condition, Criterion and Measure (Mager, 1975);
- 3) address the acronym S—K—A, standing for “Skills, Knowledge and Attitudes” that a group of learners are supposed to gain by the time they finish a class, lesson, unit, module or a course;
- 4) be consistent with not only the goal of the course but also with the overarching aim of the programme.

To correct this misconception, aims, goals, learning objectives/outcomes are not interchangeable terms. The expectations that direct a program are aims, but those ones related to courses are goals. On the other hand, learning objectives are those outcomes closely related to classroom instruction, and they emerge at the end of a lesson, class, unit, module or a course. This means the distance between learning objectives and goals is great, but between learning objectives and aims is enormous. It is important to understand that they are consistent with one another and in a hierarchical and cause-and-effect relationship.

To address principles of learner autonomy namely, learner involvement, learning objectives need to be based on a practical survey of learners’ needs in context (Graves, 2000). It is strongly recommended that the analysis of learners’ needs be a continuous process of inquiring, reviewing and appraising throughout a language course to establish a rough uniformity between learners’ needs and intended learning outcomes predetermined in a course on the one hand and the teaching materials in use on the other. Besides being aimed at language skills, systems and forms, learning objectives *must* consider learner factors in context namely, learners’ age, proficiency level, educational level, socio-cultural background and preferred learning styles. These factors have significant impacts on the teaching and learning process and are worth being studied in their own right.

The second design feature required of ELT coursebooks to promote learner autonomy is the *meaningful and comprehensible language input* that is supported by clear instructions, illustrations and explanations (Farrell, 2002). This requirement can be met through an extensive use of authentic texts carefully selected in light of the findings obtained from the analysis of learners’ needs and factors. Research proved that authentic materials have the potential to accommodate different needs as well as interests of the individual learners (Gilmore, 2007a). Harmer (2007) points out that “authentic materials are inherently more interesting than contrived ones owing to their real intent to communicate a message rather than highlight target language”, and this ensures that students can interact naturally with the language. It is often argued that authentic texts should not be included in ELT coursebooks due to their difficulty in terms of idiomatic language and lexical density (Widdowson, 2003, p. 187). However, Tomlinson (2001, p. 67) refutes Widdowson’s claim and asserts that “pedagogic materials are

definitely superficial in their coverage of language points, and too limited language experience to meet the diverse needs of all users”.

There seems to be a consensus among educational theorists and researchers that authentic materials have positive effects on language learner motivation and proficiency level (Gilmore, 2007a). Thus, learners’ extensive exposure to authentic materials is supposed to accelerate the development of language learner autonomy. This assumption is supported by the underlying principles of ‘*constructivist theories*’, “learning is an active process of data selection” (Williams & Burden, 1997, p. 21). It is suggested that students be introduced to literary texts particularly fiction constituting a rich and motivating source of authentic input owing to their being commonly read for pleasure in spare time.

The *variety and sufficiency* of texts and their associated activities constitute two other important design features required of ELT coursebooks to foster learner autonomy since the former meets the needs of various students and makes lessons more interesting, whilst the latter caters for adequate practice sharpening students’ skills and strategies to accomplish optimal success in their learning. Thus, coursebooks *must* include tasks that not only encourage but also train students in using external learning resources such as on-line learning websites and the school library. This is of crucial importance to give learners a multifaceted view to language learning. In addition, teachers need to encourage students to do tasks as collaborative work to unite for realising common learning goals. In addition, collaborative work allows students to make pragmatic and communicative benefits such as techniques to argument. In group work, “the needs of individual students can be attended” and are not shaped by the tutor’s instruction (Jacobs, 1998, p. 145). Byrne (1986, p.76) agrees with Jacobs and contends that group work allows students to communicate in an easy and free way with limited direction by the teacher. Dörnyei (2001, p. 101) corroborates and asserts that cooperation through group work increases learners’ motivation and their “expectancy of success”. Oral presentation activities are best suited to group work due to their incorporating and addressing multiple styles of learning, and this in turn encourages students to: take initiatives ‘the affective dimension’, make critical decisions concerning objectives, materials, methods as well as evaluation ‘the meta cognitive dimension’ and use the target language as the principal medium of their presentations ‘the communicative dimension’ (Oxford, 1990, p. 16-21). Most importantly, oral presentations simulate real-world tasks namely professional ones.

The fifth design feature required of ELT textbooks to foster learner autonomy is the *flexibility of materials* since learners’ backgrounds and preferences are diverse. Saraceni (2003) rightly argues that materials aiming to promote autonomy “should provide learners with the possibility of choosing different activities, tasks, projects and approaches, and therefore of adapting the materials to their own preferred learning needs” (p.76). Being flexible, a coursebook “allows for some differentiation in how the book is used by different teachers and students by introducing an element of choice” (Cunningsworth, 1995, p. 23). This view raises an important

question, in what way(s) can a coursebook be flexible? Maley (1998) answers: if it can serve adaptation. This response also raises another important question: where adaptation may be enacted in the textbook? Tomlinson & Masuhara (2004) vaguely respond: “the extent to which it is easy for a teacher to adapt the materials to suit a particular context” (p.1). Subjected to scrutiny, these views imply that the teacher needs to be flexible rather textbooks. Therefore, Graves (2001) maintains: “textbooks are tools that can be figuratively cut up into component pieces and then rearranged to suit the needs, abilities, and interests of the students in the course” (p. 188). Bell & Gower (1998) support Graves’ view and state: “coursebooks are tools which only have life and meaning when there is a teacher present” (p. 118). In the meanwhile, students should be flexible as well to deal with different sources and approaches of learning.

In addition, ELT coursebooks aiming to foster learner autonomy need to include *study skills sections* that advise, train and guide students on how to study more effectively such as using English dictionary, making notes of classes, outlining assignments in English and the like (Crawford, 2002). The inclusion of such sections should be an integral part of the regular lessons. Full mastery of these skills helps learners to develop better study habits that in turn help them gain confidence and approach language tasks autonomously without an extensive or constant reliance on the teacher (Ellis, 1994, p. 549). Research asserts that students employing effective study skills, namely cognitive and metacognitive strategies can better understand processes involved in their learning, take higher risks and subsequently exercise more power and control over their own linguistic development (Hedge, 2000). It is recommended that once students are introduced to study skills and trained in their use, they are given adequate opportunities to continue practicing on their own because the best way to fully master such skills is by their using them through regular and repeated practice.

The inclusion of *review sections* is an important additional design feature required of coursebooks to foster learner autonomy since they help students to revise any learned input and plan their next steps in the learning process. This account draws our attention to the importance of Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL) programmes that give students the opportunity not only to review but also to practice language skills inside and outside the language classroom (Tomlinson, 2014). Thus, it can be concluded that language coursebooks supplemented with on-line learning resources and websites facilitate the development of learner autonomy. Teachers must play a crucial role in guiding and motivating learners to take full advantage of such additional learning resources beside the coursebook. In parallel with the review sections, *self-evaluation sections* serve as an important tool that can help students to evaluate, reflect on and monitor their progress. Harris (1997) asserts that self-evaluation gives learners the opportunity to find out their weaknesses and solutions to overcome them. The suggestion made here is that teachers should train students in keeping learning records to monitor systematically their progress. A common record keeping suggested in the ELT literature is the use of portfolios, which can include either records of learners’ achievement or sample documents of their best work (Bailey & Heritage, 2014).

Dickinson (1987, p. 80-86) corroborates and adds further four significant required design features of ELT textbooks aiming to facilitate the promotion of learner autonomy as follows: 1) *a well-structured table of contents* where learners can detect goals and content of every lesson; 2) *a good index* in the form of a thorough alphabetical list of all significant ideas, people, topics, places, terms or terms that a coursebook encompasses with page references so that students can review, locate and check points of interest in the context; 3) *add-ons* such as workbooks, grammar books, audio CDs, web-based additional and test booklets to provide learners with additional practice when the teacher is not available, particularly for able students who are curious about learning and research; 4) *reference materials* with vocabulary references in the form of a glossary or word list either at the end of each learning unit or at the end of the textbook which learners can utilise as revision on their own. Arguably, the attractiveness of the book, meaning the layout, size of unit, illustrations and accessibility is an important design feature to ensure clear and effective organisation of the lessons.

3.2 Design Features required of tasks to foster language learner autonomy

Having defined and addressed the ambiguities surrounding the definitions, components and typologies related to the concept of *task* in the ELT literature, the discussion in this section is aimed at responding to the second part to the research question: what are the design features required of language tasks to foster learner autonomy?

3.2.1 Tasks aimed at raising students' awareness of their learning

Many educational theorists assert that tasks aiming to raise students' awareness of language learning facilitate the development of their autonomy (e.g. Hedge, 2000, p. 86; Nunan, 1997, p.196). This means students need to be fully acquainted with their learning needs, goals, weaknesses and choices. Reflection constitutes an essential factor for students' awareness about their learning. Fenner (2000, p. 89) argues for the crucial role of reflection in raising learners' awareness since it is only then that students are able "to evaluate themselves, realize their needs and plan new steps in the learning processes". Cotterall (2000, p.112) suggests that teachers devote adequate time to raise learners' awareness about their learning. This raises an important question: what are those types of tasks that can promote learner reflection? Surveying the relevant literature emphasises that self-assessment-based tasks are essential in this regard (Brown & Hudson, 1998) due to their providing learners with useful knowledge about their needs, strengths, weaknesses, progress and materials in use (Harris & McCann, 1994, p. 63). Being involved directly in the assessment process, learners' understanding of responsibility is reinforced (Gardner, 1996). However, certain disadvantages may appear due to the inaccurate learners' self-estimates, which depend on the "linguistic skills and materials involved in the evaluation". In other words, more proficient students tend to undervalue their language abilities. To avoid this limitation, it is suggested that self-assessment activities should form an

integral part of everyday learning units to encourage learners to monitor their progress progressively and reflect on new plans for improvement.

3.2.2 Tasks differentiated to address learners' individual differences

Differentiated instruction constitutes an essential part of the communicative curriculum dictating that “learners learn best when their teachers effectively address variance in students’ readiness levels, interests and learning profile preferences” (Tomlinson, 2005, p. 263). In fact, differentiated instruction is an impending need particularly in the heterogeneous classrooms due to the awareness of students’ “essential diversity” (George, 2005, p. 188). In such classrooms there is a clear recognition of the students’ unique needs, abilities, attitudes and interests. Arguably, differentiated instruction is particularly important for both gifted and slow learners in order not to lose motivation and interest in the regular classroom (Jones, 2000, p. 107). The promotion of learner autonomy through differentiated instruction is accomplished when students are regularly introduced to a variety of tasks addressing learning styles particularly in small group work where the teacher has the chance to be closer to individual students (Convery & Coyle, 1993, p.43). Not only this, but also when learners have freedom to choose tasks compatible with their preferences and participate in adapting activities irrelevant to their learning styles, interests or needs (Nunan, 1997, p. 199). This enhanced freedom of choice is important to develop learners’ critical and reflective attitude towards language learning. To realise this, teachers should relate classroom activities to project work which fosters “meaningful student engagement with language and content learning” (Stroller, 2002, p. 107). There is a direct link between project-based assignments and learner autonomy. Since negotiation is central to project work that involves students in “the decision making process about topics, content and process materials”, learner responsibility towards their learning becomes an expected outcome. As Smith (2000, p. 57) maintains, negotiation acknowledges the students’ needs and wishes beside adding to students’ motivation and responsibility.

3.2.3 Tasks dedicated to strategy training

Learning strategies are defined as “procedures that facilitate a learning task” (Chamot, 2005, p. 112), and they constitute a fundamental component of learner training (Oxford, 1990). Various taxonomies exist for the classification of learning strategies such as O’ Malley and Chamot, (1990) who classify them as “cognitive, metacognitive and social affective”. Oxford (1990) divides strategies into direct ones which include “memory, cognitive and compensation strategies” and indirect ones which comprise “metacognitive, affective and social strategies”. Tasks involving strategy training, such as activities that give learners advice on how to apply particular strategies to certain skill-based tasks, not only train learners at a metacognitive level but also support students’ various learning styles. Cohen (1998, p. 70) points out that strategy training promotes learner autonomy owing to its allowing students to choose their own strategies in a spontaneous way without being continuously prompted by the teacher. For the

promotion of learner autonomy, the literature underlines the beneficial use of cognitive strategies that “help learners make and strengthen associations between new and already known information and facilitate the mental restructuring of information” (Oxford, 2001, p. 167). Yet, metacognitive ones “describe mental operations used by learners in the self-management of their learning” (Oxford, 1990, p. 231). Arguably tasks should promote “the informed training” where students are presented with the rationale of learning particular strategies and the evaluation of their performance. Thus, the explicitness of strategy instruction has proven to improve learners’ motivation, particularly for low achievers (Harris, 2000, p. 231). On the other hand, one should be cautious of strategy training since it is likely that strategy training may make students mindful of strategies they use without being aware of it (Dam et al, 1999, p. 51).

3.2.4 Tasks requiring learners to use external resources

Coursebooks aiming to foster learner autonomy need to include language tasks guiding students towards the use of “external resources” such as dictionaries, encyclopedias, authentic materials and online resources (Fenner, 2000, p.129). These resources assist in reducing learners’ over dependence on textbooks and in turn foster their autonomy, particularly tasks that give learners unlimited opportunities to access authentic sources of materials. Little (1997, p. 231) contends that “exposure to authentic texts from an early age facilitates the development of learner confidence and motivation for language learning”. Riley (1981, as cited in Dickinson, 1987, P. 68) makes a strong assumption that tasks which are based on authentic materials help learners to accelerate towards autonomy since this type of material “meet learners’ needs accurately and economically”, and this in turn enables them to interact naturally with language (McGarry, 1995, p. 3). More importantly from a pedagogical perspective, when learners have freedom to choose their preferred types of texts that they may use in everyday situations, they may develop individual study techniques that can be applied to various authentic documents. Arguably, there seems to be an issue concerning the design of the tasks to be used with authentic texts because adopting the principle of authenticity poses a problem as far as task grading is concerned (Guariento & Morley, 2001). The suggestion made here is that the choice of authentic texts be made according to the eight criteria proposed by McGrath (2002) due their comprehensiveness and practicality.

3.2.5 Communicative tasks encouraging personalised responses

Personalised tasks are an example of communicative activities. Although this type of tasks seems difficult to be defined due to the degree that students focus on form or meaning, and the criterion of communicative purpose varies from writer to writer (Littlewood, 2004), Nunan (1989, p. 10) states that communicative tasks are “pieces of classroom work which involves learners in comprehending, manipulating, producing or interacting in the target language while their attention is principally focused on meaning rather than form”. Personalised tasks are more advantageous as they allow for learners individual responses based on their experience,

interests, opinions and needs (Ur, 1996, p. 21; McGrath, 2002, p. 74); they make language learned easier for students to remember, facilitate communication and enhance their motivation (Hedge, 2000, p. 274); they allow learners to interpret the language in terms of their previous knowledge” (Pachler &Field, 2001, p. 56), and lastly they “provide learners with opportunities for negotiation of meaning and interaction (Swain &Lapkin, 2001, p. 99). As a result, these types of communicative tasks are closely linked to autonomy by projecting the role of the individual and the uniqueness of personal experiences. Arguably, they not only relate language learning to learners’ own lives and experiences, but they allow for students’ freedom to choose ideas of interest (Hess, 2001, p. 13). More importantly, being open ended tasks, they allow for learners many possibilities for choosing the language they will use for a particular task since there is no correct or incorrect answer as in closed ended tasks. This implies personalised tasks are essential for large multilevel classes since their advantageous use lies on the stimuli they provide for everybody to work with the new language. Particularly, jigsaw tasks and puzzles give learners unique opportunities for meaning negotiation and active participation in the learning process (Harmer, 2007).

3.2.6 Tasks approximating real-world behaviours

A large number of educational theorists assert that real world tasks promote learner autonomy since they cater for learners’ needs and seek to prepare them for future communication situations (Cotterall, 2000, p.111). According to Nunan (1989, p. 40), real world tasks “require learners to approximate, in class, the sorts of behaviours required of them in the world beyond the classroom”. They proceed from learners’ need-analysis while pedagogic ones “require learners to do things which are extremely unlikely that they would be called upon to do outside the classroom”, and they stimulate internal psycholinguistic processes of acquisition (Estaire & Zanon, 1994). Willis and Willis (2007, p. 13) maintain that real-world tasks are directly linked to learner autonomy since they increase learners’ engagement in language learning and enhance their interest and active participation. It can be argued that such a distinction is so narrow that both types of tasks should be perceived as a continuum. To elaborate, there are two routes to success in implementing language activities. One involves the acquisition through discrete practice of language skills and knowledge (pedagogic tasks), and the other is aimed at catering for a progressively more complex series of tasks with feedback at each stage (Willis, 1996). More importantly, attention should be drawn to the gap between public classroom activities and private learning ones because many ELT coursebook writers appear to fail to provide students with tasks supporting self-learning (Crabbe, 1993, p. 443). This requires teachers to organise their lessons around tasks providing students with a plethora of learning opportunities inside and outside the language classroom (Crabbe, 2007, p. 120).

3.2.7 Tasks based on group work

Despite tasks based on individual work in the autonomous language classroom being beneficial for practical, educational and motivational reasons, they are criticised for limiting learners' resources and this in turn is likely to inhibit learners from developing their strategic competence (Ellis, 2003, p. 266). Therefore, pair and group work should be encouraged to foster learner autonomy. Many authors argue that group work-based tasks allow intensive verbal interaction of a different type from teacher fronted interaction; boost students' self-esteem, educational aspirations as well as academic achievement; develop students' social competencies and; contribute to creating positive attitudes towards language learning (Johnson, 1981, p. 5; Richards 1996, p. 112; Bruton, 2002, p. 281). From the Vygotsky's social-cultural theory perspective, since "learning is a socially mediated process" in which face-to-face interaction is shared (Mitchell & Myles, 2004), getting students to work in groups meets communicative learning style, reduces learning anxiety by enabling participants to express their ideas freely and provides learners with an opportunity for practicing as well as enhancing all four processes required for speech production 'contextualization, formulation, articulation and self-monitoring' (Richard & Lockhart, 1996, p.160). However, according to Widdowson (1987, p. 87) one should be cautious of the "interactional aspect of group autonomy" since it has its own "norms and expectations", which differ from those of students and may have a negative effect on individual students. In addition, it is often argued that student-student interaction can cause some kind of cognitive conflict among students. Nevertheless, if managed effectively, it could increase student motivation, higher levels of cognitive development and reasoning skills. In other words, when students are exposed to alternative or contradictory viewpoints from their peers, they are likely to be encouraged to seek more information, or they may take alternative perspectives. However, for cognitive conflict to be constructive, teachers need to establish a supportive classroom climate 'rapport' that is more cooperative than competitive. Alongside this, they should promote students' dialogue etiquettes and values namely, respect of differing perspectives of others.

3.2.8 Tasks based on top-down approach to learning

Aiming to foster language students' autonomy, teachers should engage students in a variety of tasks that deal with the top-down approach to learning "to achieve a balance between the linguistic and the schematic aspects of learner language development" (Hinkel, 2006, p.111). Particularly, for the receptive language skills, a top-down approach based upon the activation of schemata, "the networks of information stored in the brain which act as a filter for incoming information" is of crucial importance (Alderson, 2000, p. 17). On the contrary, the bottom up approach determines "a process of decoding written symbols, working from smaller units to larger ones", and it presupposes "the use of strategies to decode written forms in order to arrive at meaning" (Nunan, 1989, p.33). In this respect, the use of tasks that involve a top-down approach to second language learning can be significantly effective since the activation of

schemata helps learners to interpret texts through using their background knowledge (Carrel & Eisterhold, 1983, p. 556). This approach is thought to greatly contribute to the promotion of language learner autonomy. When using such a method, students are expected to develop skills and mechanisms necessary for interpreting the input through their knowledge of the world even when not being guided by their instructor.

4. IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSION

In the final analysis, the findings concluded in this review paper can be perceived as parameters that not only provide classroom teachers and textbook writers with crucial guidelines on evaluation and adaptation of any deficiencies embedded in coursebooks aiming to foster learner autonomy, but they can also create more stimulating and user friendly materials. Most importantly, when formulated in a checklist, they become a set of criteria that can constitute as a foundation for coursebook evaluation and function as a useful tool in the hands of teachers willing to evaluate whether or not a particular series of textbooks has the potential to develop learner autonomy. Tomlinson (2003a, p. 5) stresses the importance of evaluation of materials and argues that this procedure can help “prevent many of the mistakes made by writers, publishers, teachers, institutions and ministries and which can have negative effects on learners’ potential to benefit from their courses”. It should be also noted that evaluation of materials not only prevents mistakes, but also gives all parties involved in the learning-teaching process the opportunity to gain an insight into the principles underpinning materials design, implications of learning theories and learner needs in context. Since instructional materials are time limited, they must be reviewed and evaluated on a regular basis to make sure they are updated and well-functioning.

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