

---

# UNIT 4    **HELPING THE LEARNER TO BE AUTONOMOUS**

---

## Structure

- 4.0 Objectives
- 4.1 Introduction
- 4.2 What is Learner Training and the Need for it.
- 4.3 Bicycle Riding and the Art of Learning
  - 4.3.1 Different styles of learning
- 4.4 Preparation Towards Becoming an Autonomous Learner
- 4.5 Learning Strategies
- 4.6 Characteristics of a Good Language Learner
- 4.7 Role of the Teacher
- 4.8 Let Us Sum Up
- 4.9 Key Words
- 4.10 Suggested Reading
- 4.11 Answers

---

## 4.0 OBJECTIVES

---

With the help of this unit you should be able to understand:

- what learner training is
- the need to shift the emphasis from teaching to learning
- what preparations are needed to make the learner learn
- the different language learning styles
- the techniques for promoting learner autonomy
- the characteristics of a good language learner
- the role of the teacher in facilitating learner autonomy.

---

## 4.1 INTRODUCTION

---

The ultimate aim of education — of all attempts at teaching — is to make the learners capable of doing things on their own. They need to be able to cope with the unpredictable. During this period of formal education (in school) they have to acquire learning skills. We as teachers must enable them to do so, and the training we impart should allow them to learn on their own, when the prop of the teacher is withdrawn. That is what education is all about.

Although training the learners to learn by themselves is not a new concept, there has been a revival of interest in helping learners to take on more responsibility for their own learning.

---

## 4.2 WHAT IS LEARNER TRAINING AND THE NEED FOR IT

---

The techniques and procedures for preparing learners to be autonomous and helping them to become more effective learners is commonly known as learner training.

All language courses come to an end, but in very few do all the pupils learn everything by the end of the course. In language learning the very idea is ridiculous – there is far too much to learn. In fact, in many areas of study, learners continue learning about the subject after the end of the course. This is specially true in ‘practical’ subjects like cooking, vehicle maintenance, gardening, sewing, etc. But in language learning it is only the successful few who continue to learn at the end of the course. Why?

A language is a highly complex set of systems, structures, and rules and consequently the process of learning is fairly complicated. So, while any reasonably intelligent person can learn more about gardening or motor car maintenance fairly easily by reading and practice, the same may not be the case with language learning. Therefore, a person who wishes to continue learning a language independently has to first learn how to do it, and has to build up his/her confidence in his/her ability to do it.

Some of the other reasons to advocate learner training are:

- Autonomy or being able to think and work independently is increasingly viewed as a basic human right. The goals society has for education are ultimately much broader than simply the achievement of certain areas of knowledge and skills. A democratic society protects its democratic ideals through an intellectual process leading to independent individuals who are able to think for themselves.
- Learners are recognised as individuals with different ways of learning. The process of making a learner autonomous is a way of coping with various sorts of differences among them. It is common knowledge among teachers that learners differ in their preferences regarding how to learn. Some need to learn grammatical rules, others claim never to look at them; some enjoy struggling to communicate in English, others are very embarrassed if they are required to perform so simple a communicative act as greeting someone. Some cannot remember anything unless they write it down, others have very good aural memories, and so on.
- Learner training is essential for continuing the process of education. At the college level, education becomes freer and less dependent on the teacher. In such conditions a learner trained to study independently would be able to cope with the situation much better.

### Check Your Progress - 1

Why do you think training for learning is important? Please state any other reasons not mentioned here.

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

---

## 4.3 BICYCLE RIDING AND THE ART OF LEARNING

---

Read this account of a young girl’s experience about learning to ride a bicycle.

I sometimes ride a bicycle to school. When and how did I learn it? I remember it was during the summer vacation when I was seven. I was the youngest in the family and too

small to reach the pedals on my brother's bike. So my parents bought me a smaller bicycle.

I got on to the bike and came down hard on the pedals. I tipped over. I got back and tipped again. The bike fell on top of me and I had bruises all over. Kids younger and smaller than I could ride a bicycle with great ease. I had to learn, so I kept at it. In a week I could ride pretty well. Today I can read, write, swim, cook and drive a car and also do minor repair work. I learned them all the same way. There is something very simple in this way of learning. I needed to know or do something, so I went after it. It was hard, and hurt at times, but it worked.

But learning in the classroom was not like learning to ride a bicycle. Often I sat passive, waiting for the class to be over. Sometimes I got interested in something and read about it. Anyway, I did well in tests and exams and everyone thought I was a good student, but I have forgotten many things I learned in school!

**Check Your Progress - 2**

1. What factor/factors helped this seven year old child to learn how to ride the bicycle?

.....  
.....  
.....

2. Why do you think she forgot everything she learnt in the school?

.....  
.....  
.....

3. Ask four/five school children of different age groups, how they learnt any particular skill. (Do not exceed 3 short paragraphs)

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

**4.3.1 Different Styles of Learning**

Here are the beliefs of three students about how they learnt English and how well they can use it.

“Talking and reading English story books are two very important things. I talk to my friends in English and read a lot — stories, novels, the newspaper and many magazines. I listen to the News on the radio everyday.”

Sheetal

“I studied English for ten years. We learnt a lot of grammar. Too many rules and as many exceptions to the rules. But I know my grammar. I can read well and also write fairly well. But I can't speak fluently. So whenever any conversation in English takes place I keep quiet though I wish to say a lot.”

Pawan

“I did very well in the English exam because I have a good memory. I worked very hard, knew my lessons backwards and also knew how to answer questions in the exams keeping to the word limit and all that. But though I generally clear all my written entrance tests I feel miserable during an interview.”

Ratan

### Check Your Progress - 3

1. Read the experiences of these three learners again carefully and fill in this table:

	Pawan	Ratan	Sheetal
(i) factors which helped in using the language			
(ii) factors which did not help in using the language			

2. Given below are the experiences of five students on what helped them in learning English. Write your comments and reactions to the different learning styles of the students. Ask five more students how they learned English.

#### Student 1

What helped most in learning English was reading a lot, listening to the radio, watching TV. Using the language outside the classroom, talking to friends, talking to officials at public places e.g. railway station, post office, etc.

#### Student 2

The things that helped me least were - knowing the grammar rules and memorizing them, and reading aloud in the class.

#### Student 3

I would say that the teacher talking most of the time in the classroom did not help me much. I wish she had given me more opportunities to use the language in the classroom.

#### Student 4

The fear of punishment was one single factor for my not being able to use English fluently. Every time I made a mistake or mispronounced a word my teacher corrected it or criticised me openly in front of everyone.

#### Student 5

What helped me most was that I took down almost everything that the teacher said in the class, the meanings of the words, explanations, etc.

---

## 4.4 PREPARATION TOWARDS BECOMING AN AUTONOMOUS LEARNER

---

We have already seen that learners find it difficult to become autonomous in language learning due to the complexity of the subject matter. Because of this, pupils need three kinds of preparation which are closely interlinked. According to Leslie Dickenson and David Carver the three areas of preparation are:

1. They need to know how to continue learning a language — **methodological preparation.**

- The learners need to be given extended practice in organising their own work:
  - how to make notes
  - how to answer questions
  - how to read and understand, with context clues
  - how to work in a group
  - how to organise one's written work.
- The learners need practice in correcting their own work, both written and spoken, either from answers provided or from other sources.
- They need practice in keeping records of their own progress.

2. The learners need to develop self-confidence in their ability to work independently of the teacher -- **psychological preparation.** And it is the most important aspect of the preparation. This can be done effectively by development of **process orientation.** This means the development of an attitude in which education is viewed as a formal process of acquiring learning rather than a game in which players score points by getting the right answers — which is **product orientation.**

For example, when writing an answer/essay does the learner go through the stages of thinking, organising ideas, making rough drafts and then writing the final answer/essay, or does s/he copy a good answer/essay; write it with the help of an adult — in which case the process aspect is totally lost. The next time s/he has to write an answer/essay s/he is still very dependent.

The development in the learner of an awareness about his/her own learning is also essential. This can be fostered by giving opportunities for discussion of how different pupils go about particular learning tasks, of what learning difficulties different pupils have and how they might overcome them.”

3. Finally the learners need to be given practice in taking responsibility for their own learning, that is, such things as initiating activities, making decisions about aspects of their own learning and so on. All this could be called practice in **self direction.** For example, giving learners opportunities to gain periods of independence from the teacher – as in pair work, group work, project work, etc.

**Activity - 1**

As a learner-centred approach is based on the belief that learners will bring to the learning situation different beliefs and attitudes about the nature of language and language learning, so learners (specially at the secondary level) can be encouraged to reflect on their attitudes, beliefs and preferences by completing some tables and questionnaires.

Here are some simple exercises and activities that you could try out with your students.

1 a. How and where do you like learning? Number the following from 1 (best) to 5 (least)

1	2	3	4	5
best	good	o.k.	not much	least

- Learning at home by myself \_\_\_\_\_
- Learning at home with a friend \_\_\_\_\_
- In the class listening to the teacher \_\_\_\_\_
- In the class working in pairs \_\_\_\_\_

- In the class working in groups \_\_\_\_\_
- In the class working alone \_\_\_\_\_
- At home with parents or elder brother/sister \_\_\_\_\_
- At school in the library \_\_\_\_\_

This will give you feedback about the learner preferences which will be very useful in modifying your own teaching .

You could also have a class discussion about the various preferences.

- b. Please write a short report of your findings after administering this questionnaire to a group of learners.

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

2. Make your learners work in small groups of four each and ask them to make a list of all the ways they can use the television and the radio to help them learn English.

Then ask one person from each group to present their group's suggestions to the rest of the class.

Together all the groups can compile one big list. You could at this stage add some of your suggestions to the list.

3. Give out this questionnaire to your learners.

Do these statements describe the way you learn? Write Yes/No against each statement:

- It does not matter if I listen or read \_\_\_\_\_
- I try and use new words I have learnt \_\_\_\_\_
- I plan what I'm going to say before I speak \_\_\_\_\_
- If someone doesn't understand me, I try and say it in another way \_\_\_\_\_
- I try to find my own solutions in learning English \_\_\_\_\_
- I always ask someone to explain things I don't understand \_\_\_\_\_
- Outside the class I try and practice speaking English \_\_\_\_\_
- It doesn't bother me if I make mistakes \_\_\_\_\_

One of the advantages of systematically incorporating into one's teaching these learning-how-to-learn tasks is that learners became aware not only of their own preferred ways of learning, but also the fact that there are choices, not only in what to learn but also in how to learn.

These would encourage learners both to be more flexible in their approach to learning and to experiment with a range of learning experiences.

It has been found that learners who are initially uncomfortable during pair/group work and other interactive tasks became very enthusiastic about such tasks as a result of experimentation.

(These activities and questionnaires have been adapted from **Language Teaching Methodology** by David Nunan.)

## 4.5 LEARNING STRATEGIES

The training which learners should receive should prepare them to direct the course of their own learning, that is, it should take them from their states of varying degrees of dependence to the state of the greatest of independence or autonomy which is possible in a given set of circumstances.

If this is to occur, then the learner must acquire a number of relevant learning techniques or strategies. Learner strategies refers to language learning behaviour(s) that learners actually engage in to learn and regulate the learning of English (as a second language in this case).

Some of the most important strategies are:

### 1. COOPERATIVE LEARNING

- pair work (Some aspects of pair work and group
- group work work have already been discussed in
- role play. Course 3, Block 1)

#### Pair Work

- Why is it needed?
- \* Provides a lot of oral practice
  - \* Gives learners a chance to work independently
  - \* Prepares learners for group work
  - \* Provides an opportunity to talk face-to-face, which reflects real life situations

- How does a teacher organise pair work?
- \* Give clear instructions
  - \* Make sure that the students have understood the task by asking a few questions
  - \* Help students to form pairs quickly
  - \* Set the time limit and keep to it
  - \* Keep the activity simple and short

- What's the teacher's role during pair work?
- \* Organise and observe
  - \* Move around the class and help whenever asked/required
  - \* Control the noise level to some extent
  - \* Accept occasional use of mother tongue

How does a teacher know if learning is taking place?

- \* Encourage and involve shy students
- \* Record grades for continuous assessment
- Ensure some follow-up activity through -
- \* Reports by group leaders
- \* Class discussion
- \* Informal supervision
- \* Feedback to students by you (both positive and negative).

## 2. Group Work

What is the difference

Pair and group work differ in:

- \* time set
- \* nature of the group work
- \* type of activity.

	Pair Work	Group Work
Time	5 to 7 mins	10 to 15 mins.
Size of the group	2 students	4 to 6 students
Type of activity	information gap - interview - completing tables - filling in maps - puzzling out meanings - answering short questions	- meetings - panel discussions - drafting written work

Why is group work needed?

Because students

- \* are encouraged to participate
- \* feel confident and free to communicate with peer group
- \* can pool their ideas
- \* can correct each other.

How does a teacher organise group work? (refer Course 3, Block 1)

- \* Form mixed ability groups
- \* Plan ahead in case of change in groups
- \* Keep the movement of the students to the minimum (Students turn and face each other)



What is the teacher's role during group work?

### Monitoring

- \* Allow groups to select their leader
- \* Ensure that everyone gets a chance to speak
- \* Help when asked and when you feel a group needs it
- \* Control noise level as far as possible
- \* Accept occasional use of mother tongue
- \* Involve shy students
- \* Record grades for continuous assessment.

Feedback is provided by

- \* group reports
- \* informal supervision
- \* class discussions.

How does a teacher know if learning is taking place?

### 3. Role Play

What is it?

- \* Students play imaginary characters in given situations

Why is it needed?

- \* It brings a wide variety of language experiences into the classroom.
- \* It gives an opportunity to use language as used in real life situations.
- \* It helps better self expression (as it is full of fun and enjoyment)

How does a teacher organise role play?

- \* Prepare enough sets of cue cards in advance (cue cards are given to learners to tell them which role they are to play and what they have to do)
- \* Allot the roles to suitable students
- \* Give clear instructions for the task
- \* Make sure the students have understood the situation and the task
- \* Set a time limit and keep to it.

What is the teacher's role during role play?

- \* Organise and observe
- \* Walk around the class and help when asked for

- \* Note the errors and deal with them later
  - \* Control noise level to some extent
  - \* Accept occasional use of mother tongue
  - \* Encourage and involve shy students
  - \* Record grades for continuous assessment.
- How does a teacher know if learning is taking place?
- Ensure some follow-up activity through
- \* reports by group leaders
  - \* class discussions
  - \* informal supervision
  - \* feedback to students by you (both positive and negative).

You may not have tried these strategies in your classes. Therefore here are some suggestions about some classroom methods that will help the learner in becoming independent.

#### **Puzzling out things for themselves while reading an unknown text**

- word meaning - from context clues
- using the index
- using the layout
- using the print size, etc.

#### **Corrections**

- Self correction

The process whereby the learners correct their own written exercises by

- editing their work
- checking against provided answers.

- Peer correction

- When two students work together at correcting each other's work, the discussion helps each other to learn from his/her own errors.
- We all have difficulty in seeing our own mistakes. Cooperation helps develop an ability to see our own mistakes.

- Choice of activities

The process whereby the learners have varying degrees of freedom to decide what they will do. For example, in a composition class a teacher can give a choice of activities (perhaps on the same topic): an essay, a letter, a diary entry, poem, or a newspaper report, and let the learners choose what they wish to write. Then perhaps all those who wish to write in a particular style could form a group and discuss and exchange views before writing.

- Trouble shooting sessions

Learners are encouraged to talk about their learning problems, things they find difficult, activities they dislike, indeed everything that bothers them.

- **Confidence sessions**

On the same lines as the trouble-shooting sessions, students are encouraged to talk about what they like, what activities they wish to do again and again, etc.

- **Use of pupil teachers**

Learners are encouraged to teach each other, either formally or informally. In each group, a good learner is made the leader. This is the formal situation. Informally, there can be a general understanding that it is acceptable for learners to seek help from each other.

Extensive reading, speaking and listening outside the classroom.

### **Check Your Progress - 5**

1. Use as many strategies listed here in the English class with a group of learners.

Ask the learners to write down three things that helped them the most and in what way they were helpful.

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

2. Develop a list of strategies which students can use to practice their English out of the class. Get them to use the strategies over a number of weeks. Ask them to keep a diary of their language learning experiences. To what extent did conscious attention to language use outside the class help improve language skills or alter learner attitudes?

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

3. Review your coursebook and use some of the strategies mentioned in this section. To what extent do they enhance learner's perception of their own learning. Do they appear to make your students better learners?

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

---

## **4.6 DEFINITION OF A GOOD LANGUAGE LEARNER**

---

The following list has been compiled by combining the research of Naiman et al. 1978.

**Good language learners have the following characteristics :**

They

1. find a style of learning that suits them.
2. try to figure out how the language works.
3. are like detectives; always looking for clues that will help them understand how the language works.
4. are creative and experiment with language.
5. learn from their errors
6. use knowledge of their first language in mastering a second language
7. learn different styles of speech and writing and learn to vary their language according to the formality of the situation.

This list has been given to make you aware of the qualities of a good language learner so that you can provide these opportunities to your students.

**Check Your Progress - 6**

1. Make a list of activities that provide opportunities for your students to become good language learners.

You could give the following task.

There was a small fire in the school bicycle shed. You have to write two reports:

- a) A report to be written by the school sports teacher for the principal
- b) A report to the sports teacher by the students who first discovered the fire.

In groups of four or five, the students first discuss the content of each report and then write them in the appropriate style. Make sure that the first report will be more formal than the second one.

**Note :** By making them write two reports about the same event you would be helping them think about different styles of writing according to the formality of the situation.

By making the students first discuss the topic in groups you will be encouraging independent thinking and sharing of ideas.

- B. Now choose 5 activities that you tried with your students and report them as has been done in the example given above.

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

---

## 4.7 ROLE OF THE TEACHER

---

Why is it difficult to teach English in our particular circumstances? To a large extent, it is because we are attempting to teach in the classroom what is normally and perhaps best learned outside it.

As we have already seen, our main concern as language teachers is not to inform our students about the language but to develop their ability to use the language for a variety of communicative purposes.

What then, is your role as a language teacher in the classroom? It goes without saying that in the first place your task is to create the best conditions of learning. In a sense, you are a means to an end, an instrument to see that learning takes place.

You will play different roles at the three stages of the learning process.

- Presentation** : when you introduce something to be learned
- Practice** : when you allow the learners to work under your directions
- Production** : when you give them opportunities to work on their own.

**Presentation Stage** -- Your main task is to serve as a kind of informant. You know the language, you select the new material to be learned and you present this.

**The Practice Stage** -- At this stage it is the students' turn to do most of the reading/speaking/writing, while your main task is to devise and provide the maximum amount of practice. Your role, then, is radically different from that at the presentation stage. You do the minimum amount of talking. You are like the skilful conductor of an orchestra, giving each of the performers a chance to participate and at the same time monitoring their performance to see that it is satisfactory.

**The Production Stage** -- It is a pity that generally language learning stops after the practice stage. However, at any level of attainment, the students need to be given regular and frequent opportunities to use language freely, even if they make mistakes. Thus, in providing the students with activities for free expression and discreetly watching over them as they carry them out, you now take on the role of a manager and a guide.

#### Check Your Progress - 7

1. Explain the main difference between the three stages of language learning.  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....
  
2. To what extent do you find the three stages helpful? Would you like to modify them? If so, how?  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

---

## 4.8 LET US SUM UP

---

Let us recapitulate the different aspects of what we have discussed in this Unit.

### Learner Training

What is it?

- techniques + procedures ---- for preparing learners to be effective and independent learners.

Why is it needed?

- to think independently — a basic human right.
- individuals have different learning styles for continuing their education.

Qualities of a good language learner

- finds a suitable learning style
- figures out how language works
- looks for clues
- experiments with language
- makes errors work
- uses mother tongue as a tool not a handicap
- adapt style to circumstances

Learning–Teaching Strategies

- co-operative learning
- puzzling out things
- self and peer correction
- choice of activities
- trouble-shooting sessions
- confidence sessions
- using pupil teachers
- extensive language activities outside the classroom.

Different styles of learning

<b>Helpful</b>	<b>Not so helpful</b>
* talking	* doing well in exams
* reading story books	* writing good answers
* listening to Radio news, discussions, etc.	* knowing all grammar rules
* appearing in interviews	* good memory

Role of the teacher

- Presentation stage : Informant
- Practice Stage : letting the learners work — monitoring their performance
- Production stage : manager, guide.

---

## 4.9 KEY WORDS

---

<b>Autonomous learner</b>	A learner who can continue learning independently.
<b>Learning strategies</b>	Activities which will take the learners from dependence on the teacher to an independent way of learning.
<b>Learner training</b>	The techniques and procedures for preparing learners to be independent and effective learners.
<b>Peer correction</b>	Two or more learners work together at correcting each other's work.
<b>Process orientation</b>	The development of an attitude in which education is viewed as a formal process of acquiring learning.
<b>Product orientation</b>	When the end product is important, and not the stages of learning.
<b>Role play</b>	learners play imaginary characters in a given situation. This task is to simulate real-life activities.

---

## 4.10 SUGGESTED READING

---

Here are some books and articles in journals that you may find useful.

Dickinsen L. and Carver D.J. 1980. Steps Towards Self-direction in Foreign Language Learning in Schools. *ELT*. Vol. 35: 1-7.

Dickinsen L. 1987. *Self-instruction in Language Learning*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.

Naiman, N., Froilich, M., Stern, H.H., and Todesco, A. 1978. *The Good Language Learner*. Research in Education series No. 7. Toronto, Ontario Institute for Studies in Education.

Nunan D. 1985. *Language Teaching Course Design: Trends and Issues*. Adelaide : National Curriculum Resource Centre

Rajan S.K. 1988 *Learner Training: A Move Towards Learner Management and Learner Focus on English* Vol. 4 No.2

Self Access Package - *A New Strategy for Learning - Interact in English*. CBSE, Delhi

---

## 4.11 ANSWERS

---

### Check Your Progress - 1

Read 4.2 before you answer the question. Do state your own reasons as well.

### Check Your Progress - 2

1. need for a skill, perseverance, practice.
2. faulty methods of teaching, where the pupil was primarily uninvolved in the process of learning — where learning takes place merely by passively 'listening' and not 'doing'.

### Check Your Progress - 7

Read 4.7 before you answer the questions.