

**ORIGINAL ARTICLE**

**Major Hindrances to the Development of Autonomy among  
Grade Nine Students in Learning English: Baso General  
Secondary School in Debreberhan in Focus**

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*Abstract*

*In order to find out the major hindrances to the development of autonomy among Grade Nine students at Baso General Secondary School in learning English, necessary data were collected from one hundred-fifty students, three English teachers and ten students through questionnaire, semi-structured interview and focus group discussion respectively. Then, the data gathered in these ways were analyzed using percentage and mean values as well as qualitative descriptions.*

*The findings of the study suggest that learner factors (lack of confidence to learn English without a teacher, learning this language only for external benefits of passing exams and getting jobs, and lack of interest and commitment to learn English); teacher variables (limited commitment to train students to be autonomous learners and failure to use English for communication outside the classroom), instructional factors (absence of opportunities for students to engage in activities that maximize the use of English outside the classroom and to participate in planning, monitoring and evaluating learning), and shortage of English textbooks as well as other useful resources were the major impediments to the development of autonomy among the target students.*

*Finally, it was recommended that: 1) The Department of English in the target school should organize regular awareness-raising workshops for English language teachers, 2) Teachers of English need to train students on how to learn English independently, counsel them to increase confidence and commitment to take charge of their own learning, provide them with opportunities that maximize the use of English outside the classroom, encourage students to participate in planning, monitoring and evaluating their learning, 3) The school administration and other bodies concerned should make concerted efforts to acquire enough English textbooks for Grade Nine, and to make other resources accessible to students so that they engage in continued self-initiated learning of English, and 4) Further empirical investigations need to be made to get more insight into the factors that negatively impact on the development of autonomy in language learning.*

**INTRODUCTION**

Education is meant to bring about desirable behavioral changes in the learner in terms of knowledge, skills and attitude. It should, mainly, have the purpose of effecting durable outcomes on the target learners. Besides learning specific contents and acquiring skills that are relevant to certain fields, students need to be able to get, from their school experiences, the methods and techniques that help them become self-learners in their future studies and real life, too. These methods and techniques enable them to develop autonomy in acquiring further knowledge and understanding (National Education Association of The United States 1959:145-146).

The issue of learning how to learn, or developing autonomous learning skills has well been recognized in language teaching circles, especially since the advent of the movement towards communicative language learning and teaching. As such, one useful effect of the movement towards a more communicative language instruction has been the recognition given to the role the students play in the process of learning a language (Wenden 1991; Thavenius 1999). In effect, the belief that teachers teach and students learn has never been influential as such and, as a result, there has been a shift of emphasis in classroom instruction and research from the process of teaching to the process of learning, which, as Wenden comments, needs a student-centered approach and participatory model of teaching.

The techniques, strategies and processes of language learning are as worth focusing on in instruction as the content of learning is. The strategies with which students go about creating meanings and making sense of the aspects of the language they are learning should thus be considered central to the process of language learning and teaching

(O'Malley and Chamot 1990; Freeman 2000). Learners must be active actors in the process of instruction in a number of ways in order that they will be more involved in their education, and ultimately develop autonomy in learning the target language, English in our case.

The popularity learner autonomy has been gaining increasingly is also evidenced by the great emphasis it has received in the ELT literature. As Dornyei (2001) puts it, a great many books and articles have recently emphasized the role learner independence plays in producing effective and life-long language learners, by creating in them a sense of responsibility or duty-mindedness, which helps them to take the lion's share in their language study. It is believed that involving students in decisions about learning goals, activities, materials, assignments, etc. means providing them with a share of the responsibility over their own language learning (Little 1991). It is with this rationale that Brookes and Grund (1988:1) firmly argue in favor of autonomous language learning, saying, "It seems axiomatic that learner autonomy should be the goal of every learner and every teacher".

However, becoming autonomous learner is not an easy ride since it, as scholars like (Blue 1988:100) persuasively argue, poses added responsibilities of "planning, execution, and monitoring learning activities" on students. . Students also need to have positive attitude towards learning the language in focus, possess the right level of motivation in learning it, and be able to reflect on and confidently assess their learning (Clark 1987; Cook 2001). These and other important learner traits can be developed through special treatment such as appropriate and persistent learner

strategy training and learner counseling (Catterall and Crabbe 1999).

In the Ethiopian context, since the adoption of student-centered approach and communicative language teaching, there seems to be an emphasis on the subject of student freedom to participate actively in language learning, rather than being coerced only to act according to the teacher's wishes and preferences. It is also taken for granted that high school English language teachers are aware of how to encourage students to become independent learners of the language. As a consequence of this, it is generally believed that the students are persistently involved in taking charge of their learning of English.

However, the fact that there has been a claimed shift in the approach to the teaching and learning of English has not been a guarantee for the development of learner autonomy. Conversely, there are symptoms that the situation in Ethiopian high schools is otherwise. High school English language teachers, especially those who teach Grade Nine English at Baso General Secondary School, are overheard complaining about their students' inclination to entirely rely on their teachers, instead of trying to tackle their English learning tasks autonomously.

The above claim shows that there is a mismatch between the assumption and the practice regarding the development of autonomous learning among the target students. This can be ascribed to the prevalence of several hindering factors. This circumstance, therefore, calls for a research that aims to identify these hindrances, and suggest possible solutions that would help to reverse the situation. Thus, this study attempted to find out the factors related to learners, teachers, the instructional process and resource

provision that impinge on the development of autonomy among Grade Nine students at Baso General Secondary School in learning English. In its attempt to achieve this goal, the study tried to provide answers to the following basic questions:

- ❖ What are some of the student-related factors that impinge on the development of learner autonomy among Grade Nine students at Baso General Secondary School in learning English?
- ❖ What factors in the teachers can be considered responsible for inhibiting the growth of learner autonomy among these students?
- ❖ Are there factors related to the process of instruction, which hinder the progress of learner autonomy in learning English among the students in focus? If so, what are these factors?
- ❖ Are there resource scarcity problems that negatively influence the development of learner autonomy among Grade Nine students in the school in focus?

#### **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

**Research Design:** This study adopted a descriptive survey design, which employed both quantitative and qualitative techniques. Survey methodology was chosen since it is useful to describe the existing problems that challenge the development of learner autonomy in learning English. Survey is also suitable to describe a situation, phenomenon and program based on samples that represent a population (Cresswell 2003). In addition, this method, as Payne and Payne (2004) point out, is used to mix qualitative and quantitative methods in data collection and processing.

**Sources of Data:** The study used Grade Nine students at Baso General Secondary School in Debreberhan, and their English language teachers as data sources. Out of a universe of 1502 students (645 males plus 857 females) placed in 21 sections (A-T); 150 (this approximates 10 per cent of the total) were included in the survey to provide data by filling out questionnaire. Ten of the 150 respondents were also chosen to participate in a focus group discussion (FGD). In addition, 3 out of the 5 teachers who were teaching Grade Nine English in the 2009/2010 academic year were included in the survey to supply relevant data via face-to-face interview.

**Sampling Technique:** Three techniques of sampling, namely systematic random sampling, availability sampling and purposive sampling were employed in the study. Systematic sampling, by which every 10th member in the consolidated name list was taken, beginning with the first element, was applied to select the 150 student respondents out of the total population of 1502 students to fill out the questionnaire. Ten students were also drawn from among the 150 on voluntary basis, i.e. availability sampling, to participate in the FGD. On the other hand, the 3 teachers, who took part in the face-to-face interview, were selected using purposive sampling in which case the teachers who taught the highest number of Grade Nine sections (15 out of 21) were taken.

#### **Data Gathering Instruments**

To elicit data from the subjects, three data gathering methods: questionnaire (consisting of both close-ended and open-ended items), interview and focus group discussion were used.

**Questionnaire:** The questionnaire was first designed in English based on Cook

(2001), O'Malley and Chamot (1990), Wenden (1991), McDonough (1995), and Scharle and Szabo (2000), but translated into Amharic, with maximum care to maintain equivalence between the original and the translated versions, so that the respondents would comprehend each item without difficulty and respond to it with ease. The questionnaire had two types of items: close-ended and open-ended, which are common in a survey study (Robson 2002:238).

**Interview:** To compare what teachers had to say on the factors hindering the development of autonomy among the target students in learning English with students' responses to the questionnaire, a semi-structured interview, which helps interviewees to express more viewpoints than would be possible in structured-interview or questionnaire, was conducted with selected Grade Nine English language teachers. The interview items were designed in such a way that they could generate responses, though not rigidly, that would address the issues raised in the student questionnaire.

**Focus Group Discussion:** As highlighted in 2.4, focus group discussion (held with ten students) was chosen as one data gathering tool in this study for its advantage of generating information that would help to validate the information obtained via methods such as questionnaire and interview. In the design of the FGD, considerable effort was spent to structure the discussion topics in order to treat key points of the research issue, and so that the items could address the main themes raised in the questionnaire and the interview.

#### **Methods of Data Analysis**

Both quantitative and qualitative methods were applied in the analysis of the data. Accordingly, the data acquired through

close-ended questionnaire items were organized and displayed in tables to be analyzed quantitatively through the application of statistical techniques of percentage and mean value, while the data elicited through open-ended questionnaire items, interview and focus group discussion were treated using qualitative descriptions. Finally, conclusions were arrived at through the combined discussion and summary of the findings from all the three data gathering method.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **RESULTS**

In the next sections, the data collected using questionnaire, interview and focus group discussion are analyzed. The data from questionnaire and interview are

analyzed separately, while the analysis of the FGD data is interspersed with that of the data from the questionnaire and the interview.

#### **Analysis of Data from Questionnaire**

In the analysis, the data collected by closed-ended questionnaire items were organized under the themes of learner attitude, learner self-esteem, student motivation, teachers' use of English, opportunities for extended activities, training in metacognitive and cognitive strategy use, training in social strategy and availability of resources; presented in tables and analyzed quantitatively (decimal percentage values were rounded off to the next whole number), while the students' responses to the open-ended questions, .i.e. items 16, 17 and 18 were described qualitatively.

**Table I:** Learner Self-Esteem

Items	Responses												Mean (M)
	SA(5)		A (4)		UD(3)		DA(2)		SDA(1)		Total		
	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	
Learning English needs special abilities which I do not possess.	20	13	22	15	12	8	40	27	55	37	150	100	2.39
I am a good learner of English.	64	43	54	36	20	13	8	5	4	3	150	100	4.10
I can learn much English successfully without the teacher.	18	12	32	21	10	7	50	33	40	27	150	100	2.59
It is my teacher's fault if I don't learn enough English.	64	43	52	35	9	6	14	9	10	7	150	100	3.95
The principal reason why I can be good/bad in English is because I have good/bad teachers.	48	32	60	40	7	5	20	13	16	10	150	100	3.71
<b>Average Mean of Means</b>												<b>3.35</b>	

**NB:** SA= Strongly Agree, A= Agree, UD =Undecided, DA= Disagree, SDA=Strongly Disagree

The five items in table I above were intended to find out students' self-esteem in learning English. Concerning item 1, a total of 42(28%) subjects agreed that learning the English language needs special abilities which they are not endowed with. On the contrary, 55(37%) of the respondents strongly opposed the idea that learning the English language needs special abilities which some students lack. The respondents who showed disagreement, taken together, constitute the majority, i.e. 95(64%) of the entire sample. The mean ( $M=2.39$ ), which is less than the average in the scale, i.e. 3, also implies more respondent disagreement with the proposition in the first item. Similarly, in the second item, of all the respondents, 64 (43%) and 54(36%) respectively showed strong agreement and agreement, adding up to 118(79%), that they are good learners of English.

In item 3, many of the subjects, i.e. 40(27%) expressed strong disagreement with the assertion that they can learn much English without a teacher, and 50(33%) of them disagreed with this view. The respondents who articulated disagreement account for 90(60%) of the 150 students, while those who strongly agreed and those who agreed, together, constitute a lower proportion, i.e. 50(33%), and those who remained undecided were only 10(7%). In a related manner, in the fourth item where the subjects were required to tell whether they think that English language teachers should be held responsible for students' failure to learn enough English or to register satisfactory results in learning it, only 24(16%) of them disagreed with the

claim, while a total of 116(78%) respondents, 64(43%) and 52(35%) showing strong agreement and agreement respectively, fell under the agreement side of the response scale.

Item 5 was used to draw out information on whether the respondents believe that English teachers are the prime determinants of student success in learning English. The majority of the students, 48 (32%), strongly believe that the primary reason why students can be good/bad in English is because they have good/bad teachers, while 60(40%) reported that they are in agreement with this point of view. The quantities in the 'strongly agree' and 'agree' alternatives, summed up, account for the majority of the respondents, but those who said they are in disagreement with the above assertion together form a very small proportion,  $16+ 20(10\%+13\%) = 32(23\%)$ . The mean score ( $M=3.71$ ), a value greater than the average of the scale (3), can also show that there were more views that support the claim in the fifth item.

In the FGD, too, most of the participants indicated that they hold the view that the teacher, who possesses knowledge, should take the biggest share in the teaching-learning process of English. One participant, for instance claimed: "If the teacher teaches effectively, it is likely that many students become successful in learning English. If the teacher does not teach well, many students will fail. In this case, the teacher is responsible."

**Table II:** Student Motivation

Items	Responses												Mean (M)
	SA(5)		A (4)		UD(3)		DA(2)		SDA(1)		Total		
	N <sub>0</sub>	%	N <sub>0</sub>	%	N <sub>0</sub>	%	N <sub>0</sub>	%	N <sub>0</sub>	%	N <sub>0</sub>	%	
I study English since speaking English can be important for me to be able to interact more freely with native speakers.	31	21	32	21	3	2	29	20	55	36	150	100	2.70
Studying English is compulsory since it is necessary to pass examinations.	68	45	36	24	6	4	18	12	22	15	150	100	3.73
Basically, I study English because it will one day be useful in getting a job.	40	27	60	40	8	5	22	15	20	13	150	100	3.52
I study English because it is important to learn and develop knowledge.	80	53	50	34	6	4	6	4	8	5	150	100	4.25
<b>Average Mean of Means</b>												<b>3.50</b>	

The four items in the above table were meant to ferret out information from respondents on the type of motivation they are oriented to in learning English. In the six item, 63 (42%) of the subjects agreed that the principal reason why they study English was to be able to interact freely with native speakers (integrative motivation). However, 55(36%) of the sample students strongly disagreed with the statement, and 29(20%) indicated disagreement. The number of respondents who showed disagreement with the claim in the sixth item (55+29=84) exceeds that of those who reported agreement (63) by 21. This implies that most of the subjects do not seem to be integratively motivated. The fact that the mean of the responses to item 8 (M=2.70) is a little less than 3 also strengthens this inference.

In the seventh item, much more than half, 104(69%), of the respondents agreed that they study English because it is compulsory to pass examinations. Of these, 68(45%) and 36(24%) reported strong agreement and agreement in that order. Likewise, most of the FGD participants explained that the primary reason why they study English is to gain knowledge in the various subject areas and, as a result, to pass exams. This finding was also confirmed by the answers to the first open-ended question (item 16).

On the basis of these responses, it is thus possible to say that the majority of the subjects' study of English is exam-oriented.

In the eighth item, where the respondents were asked to report if their study of the English language was dictated by a need to find a better job in the future, 40(27%) and 60(40%) of them respectively indicated strong agreement and agreement with the statement. The two quantities combined, constitute the majority, i.e. 100(67%) of the total sample. In the 'strongly disagree' and 'disagree' categories, we find only 20(13%) and 22(15%) respondents respectively, together making 42(28%). As a whole, the finding here is in complete agreement with the findings in the sixth and seventh items in that all demonstrate that most of the subjects do not seem to possess integrative motivation to study English.

As indicated in the ninth item, 80 (53%) of the respondents strongly agreed that they study English because it helps them to learn and develop knowledge, and 50(34%) of them indicated agreement that they learn English for this purpose. Here, too, the result implies that the highest proportion of the respondents learn English for the purpose of gaining knowledge, not being able to communicate freely with its speakers .

**Table III:** Teachers' Use of English

Items	Responses												Mean (M)
	SA(5)		A (4)		UD(3)		DA(2)		SDA(1)		Total		
	<u>N<sub>0</sub></u>	%	<u>N<sub>0</sub></u>	%	<u>N<sub>0</sub></u>	%	<u>N<sub>0</sub></u>	%	<u>N<sub>0</sub></u>	%	<u>N<sub>0</sub></u>	%	
Our English language teacher:													
10.1. uses English for classroom teaching and interaction.	66	44	65	43	5	3	4	3	10	7	150	100	4.15
10.2. encourages students to speak in English in the classroom.	64	43	45	30	8	5	18	12	15	10	150	100	3.83
10.3. sets himself/herself in communicating in English with people including students outside the classroom.	16	11	24	17	8	5	47	31	55	36	150	100	2.33
<b>Average Mean of Means</b>												<b>3.44</b>	

The responses to items 10.1 and 10.2 in table III show that the teachers in focus use and encourage students to use English in the classroom for various purposes. While 66(44%) of the respondents strongly agreed that their English language teachers use English for classroom teaching and interaction, 65(43%) of them agreed that the said teachers use this language in the classroom for the same purposes. The subjects who disagreed with item 10.1, i.e., 14(10%) were much fewer than those who put forward positive views, which taken together amount to 131 (87%). On the other hand, the results in item 10.2, show that 109(73%) of the subjects, 64(43%) expressing strong agreement and 45(30%) showing agreement, reported that their English language teachers initiate students to interact in English in the classroom. The respondents, who disagreed constitute only 33(22%).

However, the responses to item 10.3 illustrate a case different from the replies to the preceding two items, since the results in item 10.3 demonstrate that teachers' use of English for communication outside the classroom is inadequate. A relatively big number of respondents, i.e. 55(36%) strongly believe that their English teachers fail to set themselves examples in communicating in English outside the classroom with people including students. Similarly, 47(31%) of the subjects said that their English language teachers have deficiencies in this regard.

The means in items 10.1 and 10.2 above (M=4.15; M=3.83 respectively) exceed 3, but item 10.3 has a mean value (M=2.33) which is less than 3. Thus, the above findings seem to suggest that although the teachers in focus use English for teaching as well as interaction in the classroom (Item 10.1); initiate their students to speak in English in the same setting (Item 10.2); their practice of using the language for interaction outside the classroom context seems inadequate (Item 10.3). The FGD in which one participant, for instance, said: "No, they do not speak in English outside the classroom; what they do is using much English in class," pointed to this situation.

**Table IV:** Opportunities for Extended Activities

Items	Responses												Mean (M)	
	SA(5)		A (4)		UD(3)		DA(2)		SDA(1)		Total			
	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%		
provision of extended opportunities for using English, such as:														
11.1. interviewing school personnel or people outside school.	8	5	9	6	1	1	45	29	89	59	150	100	1.72	
11.2. participating in English club activities	2	1	1	1	2	1	76	51	69	46	150	100	1.65	
11.3. correspondence with pen friends.	7	5	11	7	5	3	55	37	72	48	150	100	1.84	
11.4. extensive reading tasks such as Reading fictions or other materials written in English.	72	48	48	32	6	4	6	4	18	12	150	100	4.00	
11.5. Writing diaries about our day-to-day learning or other events.	13	9	16	11	8	5	60	40	53	35	150	100	2.17	
	<b>Average Mean of Means</b>												<b>2.28</b>	

As seen in the above table, the responses to all the items but 11.4 were not in favor of the respective claims made. In item 11.1, the subjects were requested to explain if their English language teachers encourage them to interview school personnel or other individuals outside of the school. Here, 89(59%) of them strongly disagreed with the assertion, and 45(29%) showed disagreement with it. The two quantities constitute the highest proportion of the respondents, i.e. 134(88%). In reacting to item 10.2 that required them to rate their English teachers' efforts to help them to participate actively in English club activities, again, a total of 145(97%) students expressed disagreement. In item 11.3, too, there were more responses that rejected the claim that the teachers in focus make their students undertake correspondence in English with pen friends. Out of all the subjects, 72(48%) strongly disagreed, while 55(37%) disagreed with the statement. Concerning item 10.5, 53(35%) of the students indicated strong disagreement with the claim that their English language teachers encourage them to write diaries of their day-to-day English lessons or other important events, and 60(40%) of them disagreed with this proposition. Moreover, the mean scores 1.72, 1.65, 1.84, and 2.17 respectively, are all less than 3. This also suggests that the students at issue are not encouraged by their teachers to engage in the out-of-class activities mentioned above.

Nevertheless, the responses to item 11.4 show a different case. They illustrate that the majority of the subjects responded in favor of the statement shown in this item, with 72(48%) of them articulating strong agreement and 48(32%) expressing agreement. Only few respondents, i.e. 24(16%), did not agree with the idea that their English language teachers give them extensive reading tasks such as reading fictions or other materials written in English. In addition, the mean ( $M=4.00$ ) is greater than 3, suggesting that the respondents are encouraged to engage in independent reading tasks.

Table V: Training in Metacognitive Strategy Use

Items	Responses												Mean (M)	
	SA(5)		A (4)		UD(3)		DA(2)		SDA(1)		Total			
	N <sub>0</sub>	%	N <sub>0</sub>	%	N <sub>0</sub>	%	N <sub>0</sub>	%	N <sub>0</sub>	%	N <sub>0</sub>	%		
Our English language teacher encourages us to:														
12.1. participate in setting our goals for learning English.	12	8	10	7	5	3	53	35	70	47	150	100	1.94	
12.2. take part in making decisions about what materials to use for learning English.	11	7	10	7	6	4	50	34	73	48	150	100	1.90	
12.3. taking diaries on our learning success and difficulties, etc.	14	9	9	6	7	5	59	40	60	40	150	100	2.03	
12.4. evaluate our learning Strengths and weaknesses.	14	9	8	6	10	7	56	37	62	41	150	100	2.04	
12.5. write an action plan of how to solve our learning problems or improve our learning.	18	12	11	7	8	5	49	33	64	43	150	100	2.13	
12.6. negotiate with our teacher on setting time/deadline for tasks such as assignments.	13	9	10	7	6	4	51	34	70	47	150	100	1.96	
12.7. decide on what tasks we would prefer to do.	18	11	11	7	5	3	56	38	61	40	150	100	2.16	
12.8. select partners to work with	9	6	11	7	10	7	53	35	67	45	150	100	2.21	
12.9. negotiate with the teacher on teaching methods to be pursued.	13	9	14	9	5	3	48	32	70	47	150	100	2.01	
	<b>Average Mean of Means</b>												<b>2.04</b>	

Table V shows that the sample students' responses were not in favor of the claims stated in all the respective items. For example, in items 12.1 to 12.5 down through the SDA column, 70(47%), 73(48), 60(40), 62(41%) and 64(43%) of the respondents respectively witnessed that their English teachers do not encourage them to participate in setting goals for learning English, to take part in making decisions about what materials to use for learning English, to keep diaries on their learning success or difficulties, to evaluate their learning strengths as well as weaknesses, and to write an action plan of how to solve their learning problems or improve their learning. These responses are also confirmed by 53(35%), 50(34%), 59(40%), 56(37%) and 49(33%) of the subjects, who disagreed with the ideas stated in the first five items.

Similarly, the responses to items 12.6 through 12.9 in the SDA and DA columns of the above table show that the teachers in focus do not usually let their students participate in setting time/deadline for tasks such as assignments, deciding on what tasks they prefer to do, selecting partners to work with and negotiating with the teacher on teaching methods to be pursued. Here, whereas, in the respective columns, 70(47%), 61(40%), 67(45%) and 70(47%) respectively articulated strong disagreement with the statements in the stated items, 51(34%), 57(38%), 53(35%) and 48(32%) reported disagreement.

Like the data from the questionnaire, the information obtained from the FGD revealed that Grade Nine students in the target school are not encouraged to take part in the decision-making activities mentioned above. To elaborate this, one student among the FGD participants uttered: "Students have only to answer questions asked by the teacher, and do the tasks their teacher requires them to do. It is the teacher's responsibility to make decisions on lesson objectives, tasks and assessment. Students cannot play any role in such decisions."

**Table VI: Cognitive Strategy Use Training**

Items	Responses												Mean (M)	
	SA(5)		A (4)		UD(3)		DA(2)		SDA(1)		Total			
	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%		
Encouragement to practise:														
13.1. inferring the meaning of new words from context.	78	52	38	26	6	4	14	9	14	9	150	100	4.01	
13.2. scanning a reading comprehension text to locate specific information.	68	45	52	35	4	3	16	10	10	7	150	100	4.01	
13.3. Skimming a given passage or paragraph to find its main idea.	70	47	44	29	7	5	15	10	14	9	150	100	3.94	
13.4. writing notes of or summarizing main ideas while listening or reading.	71	47	53	35	5	3	8	6	13	9	150	100	4.07	
13.5. predicting what a listening/reading text will be about, using different clues.	60	40	55	37	5	3	13	9	17	11	150	100	3.85	
13.6. using prior knowledge in trying to comprehend a listening/reading text.	68	45	51	35	6	4	11	7	14	9	150	100	3.98	
13.7. using clues (titles, pictures, chart, etc.) in reading comprehension activities	65	43	58	39	4	3	12	8	11	7	150	100	4.02	
13.8. relating the contents of the listening/reading text to our experience, opinion or other texts we have read.	69	46	54	36	5	3	10	7	12	8	150	100	4.05	
13.9. exercising the four stages of writing, i.e. thinking, planning, writing and checking when we write paragraphs or essays.	67	45	59	39	4	3	8	5	12	8	150	100	4.07	
	<b>Average Mean of Means</b>												<b>4.00</b>	

The average mean of the means in the above table, i.e. 4.00, is greater than the average value of the response scale (3). This illustrates the majority of the respondents' agreement with the points in all items. Likewise, if we consider the responses to items 13.1 to 13.5 down through the SA response category, 78(52%), 68(45%), 70(47%), 71(47%) and 60(40%) of the sampled students respectively agreed strongly that their English language teachers encourage them to infer the meanings of new words from context, to scan a reading comprehension text to locate specific information, to skim a given passage or paragraph to work out its main idea, to write notes of or summarize the main ideas while listening or reading, and to predict what a listening/reading text will be about using various clues. Besides, 38(26%), 52(35%), 44(29%), 53(35%) and 55(37%) subjects down the 'agreement' column expressed

agreement that their teachers give them practice in these activities.

In a related manner, 68(45%), 65(43%), 69(46%) and 67(45%) of the subjects in this order showed strong agreement that they are given opportunities to practice the techniques of using prior knowledge in trying to comprehend a listening/reading text, using clues (titles, pictures, charts, etc.) in reading comprehension activities, relating the contents of a listening/reading text to their experience, opinion or other texts they have read, and exercising the four stages of writing, i.e. thinking, planning, writing and checking when they write paragraphs or essays. Also, the statistics down the 'agreement' column in the above table strengthens this claim. Thus, these results reveal that there are much more responses which support each of the points in items 13.1 through 13.9 in table VI above.

**Table VII:** Social Strategy Training

Items	Responses												Mean (M)	
	SD(5)		A (4)		UD(3)		DA(2)		SDA(1)		Total			
	<u>N<sub>o</sub></u>	%	<u>N<sub>o</sub></u>	%	<u>N<sub>o</sub></u>	%	<u>N<sub>o</sub></u>	%	<u>N<sub>o</sub></u>	%	<u>N<sub>o</sub></u>	%		
Our English language teacher makes us:														
16.1. participate actively in the classroom by asking questions, answering questions, asking the teacher for clarifications of concepts, etc. in English.	82	55	41	28	5	3	8	5	14	9	150	100	4.12	
14.2. do activities in pairs and groups.	76	51	43	29	6	4	11	7	14	9	150	100	4.04	
14.3. Give feedback to our classmates' work (speaking, writing, etc.)	71	47	50	33	6	4	7	5	16	11	150	100	4.02	
<b>Average Mean of Means</b>													<b>4.09</b>	

As it can be seen in table VII, a total of 123(83%) respondents, 82(55%) strongly agreeing and 41(28%) agreeing with the idea in item 14.1, revealed that their English language teachers encourage active student participation in the classroom in asking as well as answering questions and requesting for clarifications in English. In addition, the table depicts that more than half of the subjects , those who strongly

agreed plus those who agreed with the assertion in item 14.2, i.e. 119(80%), confirmed that they are given opportunities to do activities in pairs and groups in English lessons. In item14.3, while 71(47%) of the respondents strongly agreed that they are encouraged to give feedback to their colleagues' spoken or written productions, 50(55%) said they were in agreement with this fact.

**Table VIII:** Availability of Resources

Items	Responses												Mean (M)
	SA(5)		A (4)		UD(3)		DA(2)		SDA(1)		Total		
	<u>N<sub>0</sub></u>	%	<u>N<sub>0</sub></u>	%	<u>N<sub>0</sub></u>	%	<u>N<sub>0</sub></u>	%	<u>N<sub>0</sub></u>	%	<u>N<sub>0</sub></u>	%	
Enough access to:													
15.1. the English textbook for Grade Nine	18	12	20	13	4	3	44	29	64	43	150	100	2.22
15.2. relevant reference materials	8	6	9	6	-	-	47	31	86	57	150	100	1.70
15.3. fictions	11	7	5	3	2	1	54	35	79	53	150	100	1.79
15.4. newspapers	9	6	9	6	-	-	51	34	81	54	150	100	1.76
15.5. magazines	8	6	9	6	-	-	50	33	83	55	150	100	1.73
<b>Average Mean of Means</b>												<b>1.84</b>	

The responses to the items in table VIII disclose that Grade Nine students do not have sufficient access to useful resources for learning English. Out of the 150 student respondents, through the SDA column in items 15.2 through 15.5, 86(57%), 79(53%), 81(54%) and 83(55%) respectively indicated that they do not have enough access to relevant reference materials, fictions, newspapers and magazines. Moreover, 47(31%), 54(35%), 51(34%) and 50(33%) down the DA column in the stated order rejected the claim that the school provides them with access to reference books, fictions, newspapers and magazines written in English. The respondents who indicated agreements with the above items are very few compared with those who articulated disagreements. Additionally, the fact that the mean values in these items (1.70, 1.79, 1.76, and 1.73) are much less than 3 shows a critical scarcity of the resources so far mentioned.

In item 15.1, whilst 64 (43%) respondents strongly claimed that they do not have enough access to the Grade Nine English textbook, 44(29%) of them choose the alternative 'agree'. This means that more than half, i.e. 108(72%) of the sample students claimed that the school does not provide them with adequate textbooks. Although the mean in this item ( $M= 2.22$ ), which is a little higher than each of the means in the other items but less than the average of the scale, might suggest that this material is not totally inaccessible to students, it can lead to the conclusion that Grade Nine English textbooks are scarce.

The relationship between the average mean of the means and the average value, expressed as  $1.84 < 3$ , also helps to capture the general tendency that the responses point to a critical scarcity of resources. Responding to the second open-ended item

(item 17), most of the respondents claimed that one of the factors that prevent them from learning English independently is scarcity of materials.

#### **Analysis of Data from Interview**

The interview results were categorized under the themes of teachers' awareness of autonomous language learning, their beliefs in learner autonomy for successful language learning, their efforts to raise their students' attitude towards and confidence in studying English, endeavors made by these teachers to help students to become independent learners of English, and hindrances to the development of autonomy among Grade Nine students.

**Teacher Awareness and Belief:** The first two interview questions were intended to elicit information pertaining to the interviewees' awareness about and belief in autonomous language learning respectively. Two of the interviewed teachers could confidently define the term 'learner autonomy' emphasizing that it is a situation in which students study independently. For example, one of them stated, "The student by himself/herself takes the initiative to learn much more than the teacher tells him/her", while the other said, "The students learn independently, but they should be award about this". Therefore, these teachers seem to have shown reasonable understanding of what is meant by student autonomy.

Nevertheless, the third interviewee did not seem to demonstrate adequate awareness of the issue. This informant, in trying to describe the term 'autonomous learning', uttered the statement, "It is necessary learning autonomous subject or language, and I advised them to practise and develop autonomous learning." In this utterance, the expression 'autonomous subject or language' looks vague. In addition, this

teacher made further speech, in which the expression “autonomous language” was repeated:

*When I was other high schools, I did many activities. There were English club. I advised the students to attend in that club in order...just to have interest especially to develop their positive attitude towards this autonomous language.*

On the other hand, those who showed understanding of the notion of learner autonomy expressed their belief in the importance of autonomous language learning, and stressed that language learning primarily needs individual efforts and continued practice which give rationale for the need to promote student independence in learning English.

***Developing Positive Attitude in Students:***

In responding to the question, “Do you think that students’ attitude towards the English language or its native speakers affects the development of their autonomy in learning it?”, the interviewees made it clear that they hold the view that attitude certainly matters in developing autonomous language learning skills. And all these informants expressed belief that actions should be taken to help learners to develop positive attitude towards learning English.

While interviewees 1 and 2 made it clear that they mostly use English for instruction and interaction in the classroom although they confessed using little Amharic in order to make some concepts clear and initiate students to participate actively in classroom interactions. They also reported that they make a lot of efforts to encourage students to use English in asking or answering questions, asking for clarifications or

paraphrasing and interacting among themselves in the classroom. Nevertheless, these teachers did not hide that, due to fear of colleague criticism, they never set themselves a model for their students in communicating in English outside the classroom. The FGD also generated information which strengthens this fact, and this finding is in tune with the students’ responses to items 12.1, 12.2 and 12.3 in table IV.

On the contrary, informant 3 indicated inability to use English even in the classroom. This informant complained that, due to lack of interest in learning English, most of the students are not willing to speak in English, and as a result, resorting to the use their mother tongue in the classroom is compulsory. “Since they were not able to understand the lesson effectively, I prefer to shift my mind to speak in their mother tongue to help the students to understand,” was what this teacher said. Unlike interviewees 1 and 2, who reported that they encourage their students to work in groups and to give feedback to their classmates’ work, interviewee 3 explained that there was no success story in this aspect of the teaching and learning process despite repeated efforts.

***Measures to Enhance Learner Autonomy:***

Interviewees 1 and 2 claimed that they take some measures in order to enable their students to be able to learn English independently. Based on this response, a probe was made for their efforts to involve learners in setting goals for learning, choosing materials to be used for learning, evaluating their progress in learning English and reflecting on their success or failure, choosing tasks to be done, setting timetable for tasks, deciding on teaching methodology, etc. The two interviewees said that they do not give their learners

opportunities to participate in these high level executive activities. Asked why, the first informant did not present any justifications, but the second believed that students do not have abilities to take over these responsibilities. In the second interviewee's own words, "The students have poor background in English. They do not even make single sentences. So, they cannot do these kinds of things."

Although the informants confessed failure to encourage their students to engage in extended activities such as interviewing people, participating in English club activities (owing to absence of English club in the school), and to carry out correspondence with pen friends, they reported that they, as the FGD participants also confirmed, make learners practise some task-specific strategies such as scanning a reading passage to locate particular information, skimming a reading text to work out its gist, guessing meanings of unfamiliar words from context, predicting what a reading or listening text is going to be about, note-making and summarizing, using one's prior knowledge to comprehend an oral or a written message, and using the four stages of writing (thinking, planning, writing and checking) to develop a paragraph or a composition.

***Factors Affecting Autonomous Learning:***

Required to enumerate the factors that hinder their students from developing autonomy in learning English, the interviewees mentioned student-related factors such as lack of interest to learn English, a tendency to be teacher-dependent, and lack of commitment leading to unwillingness to do tasks such as home works and assignments; teacher factors like lack of sufficient commitment to take time to train students to become autonomous learners of English, failure to be a model

for students in using English outside the class for various purposes as well as lack of awareness on how to help students to become independent learners, and scarcity of resources useful for learning English as the major factors that debilitate endeavors to made to help students to become autonomous learners of English. The FGD participants, too, mentioned these factors.

**DISCUSSIONS**

The findings regarding learner self-esteem illustrated that most of the students do not hold the view that learning English is what only students with special gifts can handle. This means that the majority of the respondents appear to have a positive concept of themselves as learners of English. Since language learning is liable to the influence of students' beliefs of various sorts, learners who believe that they can tackle their language learning successfully are likely to be effective learners of that language (Horwitz 1987). Put differently, students with a positive self-esteem are confident learners; positive self-esteem helps them to establish independence in dealing with language learning (Scharle and Szabo 2000).

However, the fact that the greatest number of respondents said that leaning English is not a task that only gifted students can tackle, and that they themselves are good learners of English is not a guarantee for the development of autonomy in them. The responses to the third, the fourth and the fifth items (Table I) and the information gained via FGD demonstrated that the students in focus do not seem ready to take charge of their learning of English. Instead, they tend to show dependence on their teachers, and to hold the latter responsible for student failure to learn the language successfully. Therefore, the respondents' belief that they are good learners of English might entail that they are confident to learn

this language provided that their teachers take the lion's share in the teaching-learning process. But, successful autonomous language learning is inconceivable without the learners assuming responsibility for their own learning, and taking the lead in its execution (Blue 1988).

It has been found out that most of the respondents study English with instrumental motivations of passing examinations, getting jobs and acquiring knowledge. But, while it can be said that it is interesting that these students have a clear purpose for learning English and possess a motivation of some kind, it is believed that integratively-oriented learners do better in language learning than learners with instrumental motivation (Stern 1983; Krashen 1988), since in the former case, learners practise using this language with increased willingness, commitment and responsibility, which are vital in studying language autonomously.

While teachers' efforts to maximize the use of English in the classroom should be appreciated, it could be argued that unless learners see other people including their teachers use it for interaction at various social encounters outside the classroom context, they may not develop positive attitude towards this language and learn it with maximum motivation, since positive attitude and motivation are necessary to learn second/foreign language autonomously. Autonomous language learning can also be enhanced if learners engage tasks such as interviews, English club activities, correspondence with pen pals, diary writing, etc. which maximize the use of English outside the classroom.

The findings suggested that the teachers in concern have limitations in training their students in the use of metacognitive

strategies, which involve planning, monitoring or evaluating learning. As to Dickinson (1987), metacognitive strategy use can be enhanced by delegating to students decision-making roles such as setting learning goals, selecting materials and contents, deciding on how the materials will be used, keeping records of learning, evaluating the learning progress, allocating time for tasks, deciding on what tasks will be done, selecting the groups the learners will be doing in and choosing preferred methods of teaching.

The students in focus get training in using two useful learning strategies. Firstly, they encourage practice in using cognitive strategies which, according to O'Malley and Chamot (1990), include *organizing*-grouping and classifying words, terminologies, or concepts based on their semantic or syntactic properties so as to manage reading/listening comprehension; using information in oral/written texts to guess meanings of new linguistic items; predicting outcomes, or completing missing parts; summarizing/taking notes of information presented orally or in writing; using visual images to understand and remember new verbal information, *elaboration*-linking ideas contained in new information or integrating new ideas with previously known concepts, and transferring or using previously acquired linguistic knowledge to facilitate the learning of a new language, etc. Secondly, teachers make students practice some social strategies by working cooperatively in pairs or groups with fellow students; asking the teacher for clarification of concepts, etc. This helps them to establish independent learning skills by enabling them to acquire strategies they can use to learn the language from different people in contexts other than the classroom. Furthermore, the more learners work cooperatively in pairs and groups, the more

they exercise self-reliance and autonomy in learning as they, through timer, move away from the direct control of the teacher (Dickinson 1987).

In circumstance where students do not have enough access to useful resources including the textbook, the task of encouraging learner autonomy can be challenging if not impossible. That is why Dickinson (1987) emphasizes that for learner autonomy to be exercised, the necessary materials need to be made available in a center such as school library where learners can have access to them. Therefore, Grade Nine Students of Baso General Secondary School, who do not have adequate access to English textbook, relevant reference materials, fictions, newspapers and magazines are at a disadvantage.

#### **CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS CONCLUSIONS**

The findings of the study led to the conclusions listed from 1-7 below:

1. Training students to engage in some extended activities such as conducting interviews with personnel in or outside school, participating in English club activities, undertaking correspondence with pen friends and taking diaries of their day-to-day English learning or other events are useful for developing learner autonomy. However, Grade Nine students at Baso General Secondary School seem to be at a disadvantage as regards involvement in out-of-class autonomous learning of English, since they are not initiated by their teachers to carry out these tasks.
2. Student-related factors such as lack of confidence to learn English without the teacher, i.e. low self-esteem, limited commitment to accomplish tasks such as home works, inadequate readiness to become responsible for their own learning, and learning English mainly for the instrumental benefit of gaining knowledge that helps to pass exams seem to hinder the development of autonomy among Grade Nine students at the target school.
3. The fact that one of the three interviewed English teachers seemed to lack adequate awareness of the notion of autonomous learning implies that there can also be other similar teachers at the school under consideration. It follows that these teachers could fail to promote learner autonomy, since they lack basic understanding about the nature and essentiality of autonomous language learning.
4. Grade Nine English language teachers' inadequate commitment to train students to become independent learners of English seems to have a negative impact on their students' opportunity to develop autonomy in learning this language.
5. While the English teachers' commitment to use English in the classroom and their efforts to initiate students to communicate in this language in the same setting should be given credit, their failure to set themselves models by taking courage to interact in English out of the classroom context can affect the students' endeavors to learn this language independently. This is because unless students see other people, including their teachers, use the target language for communication at various social encounters, they may not develop a positive attitude towards this language; learn it with increased motivation, which is one requirement to enhance learner autonomy.

6. The instructional process at Baso General Secondary School does not seem to encourage Grade Nine students to participate in such decision-making activities as setting goals for learning, selecting materials to be used in the classroom, taking reflective diaries of their learning success or difficulties, evaluating their learning progress, selecting tasks, setting timetables for activities, choosing teaching methods, etc. This failure to delegate the task of planning, executing and monitoring learning to students, added to other factors, significantly hampers the progress of autonomy among these students.
7. Finally, Grade Nine students' endeavors of learning English autonomously seems to be jeopardized by a critical scarcity of resources, since they do not have sufficient access to the student's textbook, relevant reference books, fictions, newspapers and magazines, which are necessary to develop self-directed reading.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

On the basis of the findings, the following recommendations were made:

1. In order to help students become autonomous learners of English, English language teachers must have knowledge and awareness about the advantage of learner autonomy. Therefore, the Department of English at the target school should organize regular awareness-raising workshops to enable English language teachers to be aware of or reinforce their understanding of the value of independent language learning and, as a result, to be prepared to assume new

roles in the classroom; and to assist them to design course objectives, contents and classroom tasks that incorporate components of autonomous learning.

2. It is necessary that Grade Nine English language teachers at Baso General Secondary School be committed to offer explicit training in which inputs can be given on how students learn English independently. In addition, it can be useful to counsel students to develop confidence to take full responsibility and increase commitment for their learning, and to believe that they can learn much English without a teacher. In short, as Thomson (1996), cited in Lee (1998), puts it, language learning is a life-long undertaking. Thus, it is necessary that English teachers, who are in frequent contact with students, help the latter to become aware of the worth of autonomous learning, acquire the habit of learning independently, practice it while they are at school and maintain it after they have completed their formal studies.
3. In addition to learning English for instrumental benefits of passing examinations, gaining knowledge and getting good jobs, it is useful for students to develop integrative motivation, i.e. learning this language in order to be able to interact with speakers of this language. To this end, English language teachers need to make their students engage in interactive tasks such as interviewing people, English club activities, correspondence with pen friends, etc. Additionally, since seeing other people use English for communication motivates students to follow suit, it is essential that teachers of this language, taking all risks, try to use it for

interaction outside the classroom with people including students.

4. Autonomous learning can hardly be conceived unless the learners play the roles of planning, executing and monitoring their learning. Therefore, English language teachers need to delegate to their students tasks such as setting goals for learning, selecting materials to be used in the classroom, reflecting on their learning success or difficulties, developing action plans of how to improve learning, evaluating their learning progress, choosing tasks to be done, setting timetables for activities, choosing teaching methods to be pursued, etc.
5. Resources such as the student's textbook, reference books, fictions, newspapers and magazines are indispensable for students to learn English independently. Thus, the administration of Baso General Secondary School, together with partners and stakeholders, should make meaningful efforts to acquire enough English textbooks for Grade Nine, and to launch a library service where other necessary materials can be made available for students to engage in continued independent learning.
6. Finally, it is essential that further more comprehensive investigations be made into the factors that exert a negative impact on the development of learner autonomy in language learning in the Ethiopian context so as to get more insight into the matter.

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