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# SHAPE OF THE TEACHER'S AND LEARNER'S AUTONOMY IN THE APPLICATION OF THE SRI LANKAN ESL CURRICULUM

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## ABSTRACT

The teacher's and student's roles are bordered with a certain fraction of autonomy. Autonomy of learning and teaching necessarily combines the teacher and student as the teacher's activity bears implications to the student's learning activity. It is necessary for the curriculum to subsume a formidable allocation of resources to facilitate liberal enactment of teaching and learning. Curriculum can vividly exploit space to contain restrictions helping the stakeholders achieve individual bands of autonomy. While research on autonomy is available in the global literature, local contribution to studies on teacher or learner autonomy in ESL curriculum needs to be amplified. This research on Sri Lankan state education expects to bridge this gap. The teacher and learner autonomy is deliberated by a degree of independence for decision- making as predicated by the Sri Lankan ESL curriculum irrespective of the possibility that students' liberty is skewed by the teacher's style of interaction. It aims to evaluate prevalence and determinants of autonomy and occurrence of teachers' influence in learners' autonomy. The sample included teacher-students following Diploma in TESL at the National Institute of Education and teachers and students from several schools. Adhering to a mixed-methods framework, an online survey and an in-depth interview were conducted. The dataset was measured for statistics and the qualitative data underwent Thematic Analysis. It was established that teachers in ESL curriculum, despite systematic restrictions, make salient alterations in the syllabus, demonstrating autonomy of decision-making. Students locate autonomy in the ESL classroom, accompanied by freedom to select.

Keywords: ESL Curriculum, Learner Autonomy, Sri Lankan State Education, Teacher Autonomy

## INTRODUCTION

The field of English as a second language learning has been witnessing the debate over the problems related to teacher - learner autonomy for decades. Teacher autonomy, which can be introduced as the professional independence of teachers to make autonomous decisions about what they teach and how they teach them to learners, became a major point of discussion in education during recent years. The concept of autonomy in general is found in many fields including political, moral and bio-ethical philosophy. It has been interpreted by scholars in a number of ways according to the discipline that it has been applied to. Holec (1983) defines it as "the ability to take charge of one's learning" by determining the learning objectives, defining the contents of teaching, choosing teaching methods and techniques to be used in the classroom to deliver the content, monitoring the process

of acquisition and finally evaluating what has been acquired through a proper evaluation mode. Little (1991) also bears the same point of view about the learner autonomy and he defines it as "a capacity– for detachment, critical reflection, decision-making, and independent action". He further elaborates his view by saying that learner autonomy involves with a psychological aspect of the learner as the learner will develop a particular kind of psychological relation to the process of learning and content of his learning. The capacity for autonomy will be exhibited both in the way that the learner learns things taught by the teacher and in the way that the learner transfers what has been learned or acquired in the process of learning to broader contexts or the outer world. In addition, the context in which learner autonomy is applied also is significant as it is a broad area that it not only involves the classroom situations but also the out-of-class situations.

The language teachers have been focusing on the implementation of the principles of learner autonomy in their classrooms as it has been claimed that students can be benefited through learner autonomy immensely in language learning. On the other hand, aiding learners become more independent in their learning is one method for maximizing their choices in life. Littlejohn (1985) suggests that the learners' enthusiasm for learning will increase when they are given opportunities to acting more autonomously. "Promoting learner autonomy can also be justified on pedagogical grounds, since adults demonstrably learn more, and more effectively, when they are consulted about dimensions such as the pace, sequence, mode of instruction and even the content of what they are studying" (Candy, 1988: 75). Sara Cotterall (1995) says that "the practical argument for promoting learner autonomy is quite simply that a teacher may not always be available to assist.

Learners need to be able to learn on their own because they do not always have access to the kind or amount of individual instruction, they need in order to become proficient in the language." (Cotterall, 1995) Accordingly implementing the principles of learner autonomy in the ESL classroom is very significant as learners become more efficient in their language learning if they are given required autonomy in learning. Further, the ESL curriculum has a great impact on teacher-learner autonomy as the effectiveness of the teaching - learning process depends on the content and the nature of the curriculum. Accordingly, teacher - learner autonomy can be viewed as an important aspect in designing the ESL curriculum.

The reason behind conducting the current research is filling the void in local literature on teacher – learner autonomy; an area which is identified as very crucial in developing ESL curriculum. For decades, a number of studies have been conducted on teacher - learner autonomy in various contexts. However, there are key questions of autonomy that have not been addressed in the local literature yet. Thus, this study addresses the need for having an investigation on teacher -learner autonomy in relation to the ESL curriculum in Sri Lanka, an area which has not been discussed so far in the academic literature sufficiently. It aims to find the extent to which autonomy works and which determinants define the form of autonomy under investigation.

The sample of the current study included the teachers and students of Diploma in TESL at the National Institute of Education along with some other teachers and students from several schools in Sri Lanka. Adhering to a mixed-methods framework, an online survey and an in-depth interview were conducted to collect data. The findings of the study prove that the teachers in the ESL curriculum make necessary changes in the syllabus demonstrating the teacher

autonomy in decision-making. Students in the ESL curriculum (or the syllabus which will be used interchangeably henceforth) also experience learner autonomy in the ESL classroom, accompanied by freedom to select and make choices. The ESL curriculum plays a big role in developing language proficiency of the students. Thus, it is essential to focus on the autonomy available to the teachers and students alike. Accordingly, the current study is very significant as the findings of the study will help to mould the structure, strategies, process along with beliefs which are necessary for the teacher-learner autonomy for it to become more effective in the Sri Lankan language learning context.

## *LITERATURE REVIEW*

The current research is primarily an investigation of Teacher - Learner autonomy in relation to the ESL curriculum for the students of the primary and secondary levels in Sri Lanka. There is a dearth of research in teacher and learner autonomy in relation to the ESL curriculum in Sri Lanka. Although there are several studies that address the issues in implementing teacher - learner autonomy in the classrooms and teachers and learners' perceptions and beliefs about teacher - learner autonomy, no study has, to the date, examined the character of the teachers' and learners' autonomy in the application of the Sri Lankan ESL curriculum. The findings of this study are likely to be crucial for acknowledgment of the concept to the local academia.

"Assessing the e-learner Autonomy among ESL (English as a Second Language) Learners in Higher Education Institutes, Sri Lanka" by Sudusinghe L.I.S & Kumara W.G.C (2021) is a cross-sectional study aimed to investigate the e-learning autonomy (e-LA) of the ESL learners in higher education institutes in Sri Lanka. The study reveals that there was a statistically important association between the academic stream and the commitment of the learners and that the necessary inventions of the lecturers are crucial in improving e-learning autonomy among the ESL learners in Sri Lanka. "Promotion of Learner Autonomy: Beliefs and Practices from the ESL Teacher's Perspectives" is a study by Ismail, Yunus, & Zahidi (2020). It reviews a few studies concerning the beliefs and practices in promoting learner autonomy. The perspectives of English teachers in Asian countries were taken into account to do the study and the data for the study were collected from Asian countries. The findings of the study revealed that there is a contradiction between the ESL teachers' beliefs and practices in promoting the learner autonomy. The findings of the study will provide some insights and references for future studies based on learner autonomy. Misir, Koban and Koc (2018), have conducted a study in Turkey by using students who were following a Massive Open Online Language Course (MOOLC) as the participants of the study. The objective of their study was to examine the perceptions of these students about learner autonomy. The findings of the research revealed that these students have high levels of autonomy. They have positive attitudes regarding the learner autonomy. The relationship between the teacher and learner autonomy in teacher education and foreign language education is examined by Ligang Han (2020), through his study, "On the Relationship between Teacher Autonomy and Learner Autonomy". The study is a tentative discussion and the researcher proposes that language teachers should change their traditional roles to facilitate the development of learner autonomy. Further, he suggests that a practicum to enhance and promote teacher learner autonomy should be included in the teacher education. M. Jamila's "Use of Learner Autonomy in Teaching Speaking

by Tertiary Level English Language Teachers in Private Universities of Bangladesh" is a study which was carried out in Bangladesh to examine the nature of the usage of the learner autonomy in English language teaching by teachers. The findings of the study revealed that there is a deficiency in learner autonomy among the private university students. Accordingly, the researcher concluded that the teachers had not implemented learner autonomy adequately within classrooms. "Learner Autonomy in EFC/ESL Classrooms in Bangladesh: Teacher's Perceptions and Practices" by Begum, J. (2019) is another research carried out in Bangladesh. Begum says that "while a lot of research have been conducted on the concept and development of learner autonomy, limited studies have investigated the ways and means of classroom practices of teachers in fostering learner autonomy in tertiary level EFL/ESL classrooms in Bangladesh" (Begum, 2019). Accordingly, by using a qualitative approach, the researcher focuses on teachers' perceptions about learner autonomy as well as the strategies they use to develop learner autonomy in university setting. The findings of the study reveal that although the teachers are interested in practicing learner autonomy in classrooms, there are some practical challenges of developing learner autonomy in classroom due to a number of reasons. Alonazi's "The Role of Teachers in Promoting Learner Autonomy in Secondary Schools in Saudi Arabia" (2017) is a study which investigates the role of English teachers in promoting learner autonomy in Saudi EFL secondary schools. The findings of the study revealed that even though the English language teachers encourage learners to be autonomous in their classrooms, the teachers are hindered by some difficulties including learner's lack of independent learning skills. Batuwatta's (2021) research "Strategies Used by English Language Teachers to Enhance Learner Autonomy – A Review" was conducted by using 14 YouTube videos as the sample of the study. Those videos were presented by English language professionals from various countries. The study revealed that the presenters emphasized on the need to give more decision-making freedom and power to learners within the teaching and learning process. The researcher highlights the importance of his study to the ELT context in Sri Lanka by saying "as the Sri Lankan ESL education is also being exam-oriented, teacher-centered and often follow rote learning practice, this analysis of the videos presented many relevant implications for the ELT context in Sri Lanka" (Batuwatta, 2021).

A closer look at the literature on teacher-learner autonomy in relation to the ESL curriculum, however, reveals a number of gaps and shortcomings. The current study, by approaching autonomy from the teachers' and learners' perspective, revealed multiple ways by which we can measure autonomy along with a call to action for implementation of autonomy for the benefit of the ESL curriculum and the education system in Sri Lanka.

## METHODOLOGY

The predominant objective of this research was to assess teachers' and learners' autonomy in the ESL curriculum. Data were accumulated by implementing two surveys observing a quantitative approach and an in-depth interview for a qualitative output, thus employing an explanatory sequential design for corroborated findings. Bazely (2004) implies that implementation of Mixed Method Approach ensures validity and credibility of a research since it emphasises on weighting of evidence through which provides a wider continuum of insightful findings of a given research problem. In this scenario,

quantitative method is used to evaluate teacher autonomy in the ESL curriculum. A questionnaire was disseminated among the ESL teachers to delve factors related to creativity in the curriculum, autonomy of selecting activities, applicability of activities for all the proficiency levels, autonomy to replace activities in the curriculum, and autonomy to pass over difficult lessons. Dissemination of questionnaire pertaining to students' autonomy check assisted to make insightful conclusions about freedom gained to students in the content, students' freedom of choosing activities, autonomy of acquiring new knowledge, autonomy provided to amend errors. Analysing data through SPSS software was potent enough to ensure realiability and vaalidity of the results. It further aided to generalize the findings.

Moreover, qualitative method paved the way to obtain detailed descriptions of participants' attitudes and experience related to application of autonomy in the ESL curriculum. Bazely (2004) further brings out that qualitative method provides a holistic understanding of human experience of the particular setting. In this scenario, interviews with teachers were able to analyse the following factors very closely; contextual irrelevance of the activities, intervention by the authorities, constraints of time, influence imposed by the Teacher's Guide in terms of making decisions by the teachers. Overall, implementation of the Mixed Method was indispensable to make generalisations as well as attaining the insightful conclusions. Consequently, use of this method directs the researchers to achieve their expected research aims. Moreover, the method facilitates a future researcher to elaborate these findings in his/her future study.

**Participants**

The sample consisted of both the males and females who were also the teacher-students enrolled in the Diploma in TESL at the National Institute of Education, Maharagama and the teachers and students from several districts in the country. Even though the stipulated size of the population of the teachers was large, only 38 of them had responded to the survey and they were teacher-students following Diploma in TESL at the National Institute of Education and secondary school teachers who currently work at government schools. Among these teachers were 27 degree holders, eight diploma holders, one HNDE holder and two of them possessed an unspecified qualification. Ten of them had also received professional training: nine in PGDE and 29 in unspecified other. The nine teacher-students who were recruited for the online interview at a later stage were selected from the same sample. While the majority of them belonged to the age category of 20-30 years, most of them owned 1-5 years of teaching experience as teachers in English. Despite the fact that the number of respondents to the survey amongst the students was comparatively less, 25 males and 17 females had chosen to respond. The majority amongst them was reported to be intermediate and advanced language users. The convenience sampling method was applied to select the participants representing different sources, but with a compulsory long-term contact with the target language. The teachers involved taught at both the primary and secondary schools whereas the students studying in Grade 10 and above were the expected cohort, as an inclusion criterion; this would provide with more reliable data as the students had probably been exposed to a considerable amount of strategic learning for preparing them for their Ordinary Level exam. Prior consent from the relevant Principals and the Ethical approval from the National Institute of Education were obtained prior to data collection. The individuals were

acquainted of the process through teachers, e-mails and social-media groups. The entire process, from the beginning to the end, encompassed technology and electronic applications from Google to Zoom to conduct the survey, to collect data and scrutinize the findings ultimately. The actual sample size for the online survey, though, was different from the intended one, such a difference could be finely complemented by the subsequent semi-structured in-depth interview and the open-ended questions included in the questionnaires.

**Materials and Procedure**

The two samples were approached by employing an online survey for quantitative data with space for adding personal opinions where required and an online in-depth interview which was a secondary measure to validate and clarify data across the surveys. This was decided observing reliability of the data collection method. The questionnaire of the teachers sent via E-mail as a Google Sheet consisted of 14 Likert Scale items in addition to the demographics. Qualification, professional training, years of teaching experience and age were listed under demographics. The questions belonged to two major categories: reflections of teacher attitudes on the syllabus and decision-making instances. The participants could state their rate of agreement with statements on a 5-point scale ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree. Under three questions, they could also clarify their choice. The objective of the survey of the students was to determine how autonomous students are in terms of English language learning. The questionnaire administered to the students primarily consisted of demographics and 14 items of a 5-point scale ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree. They expressed their views under four items. The collected data were removed of unnecessary details before they were analyzed with SPSS for the percentages, mean and standard deviation to produce descriptive findings. The in-depth interview was a semi-structured format accompanied by a question guide of four open-ended questions and space for open communication. Initials discussions were held between the interviewers prior to the interview via Zoom application. The statements were recorded with the permission from the participants. They were transcribed by an interviewer after attending a discussion round. Then they were labeled with themes and scrutinized for an inductive analysis.

## DATA ANALYSIS

The data collected through the questionnaire were vetted by using SPSS for numerical values. This encompassed the teachers' and students' surveys. The descriptive statistics, thus originated for the average mean and deviation were organized for a comparative analysis between the two surveys and inside individual data sets.

|  | N | Mean | SD |
|---|---|---|---|
| Syllabus-related Perspective (8 items) | 38 | 2.61 | 0.71 |
| Tokens of Independence (3 items) | 38 | 2.4 | 0.82 |

*Table 1*

*Major Autonomy Division within ESL Syllabus for Teachers*

Teachers' Autonomy Check

Table 1 presents the evaluation of teacher responses towards the syllabus and the capacity for unhindered movements within the ESL curriculum. The teachers indicate a medium degree of support.

Nevertheless, individual items were rated highly. The majority of the items was designed to extract the form of attitude the teachers upheld in respect of the syllabus. Accordingly, 34.2% and 2.6% of the respondents agreed strongly agreed to the statement 'I feel strained while teaching English lessons' respectively (M= 3.16, SD=0.855). The syllabus was rated to be promoting creativity in teaching by 34.2% who agreed and by 10.5% who strongly agreed (M= 2.6, SD=0.634). A remarkable percentage of 84.2% agreed and 7.9% of the respondents strongly agreed that they have several choices in their activities (M=2.00, SD=0.403). Similarly, 76.3% agreed and 7.7% strongly agreed that there are various activities for addressing different proficient levels of students (M=2.08%, DS=0.487). In contrast, it was interesting to find that most of the respondents would agree with the negatively word items except for the one which said that the subject is too heavy to teach. This was vetoed by 65.8% and 7.9% who disagreed and strongly disagreed respectively (M=3.76, SD=0.634). As indicated, 52.6% agreed and 15.8% strongly agreed that time limits restrained their teaching activities (M=2.29, SD=0.898). As reported, 26.3% agreed and 5.3% strongly agreed that the objectives listed in the Teachers' Manual restricted their performance (M=2.84, SD=0.855). The exam oriented content affect them so much that 73.7% agreed and 7.9% strongly agreed to the statement (M=2.18, SD=0.692)

Tokens of independence classified which space was available for the respondents to decide on their own. Therefore, 57.8% and 13.2% strongly agreed that they have the freedom to replace activities with more practical and interesting activities (M=2.26, SD=0.795). As indicated, 60.5% of the respondents agreed that they could decide to pass over certain difficult lessons (M=2.53, SD=0.725). Room to select methods of evaluation was deemed to be available by 47.4% and agreed and 13.27% who strongly agreed (M=2.42, SD=0.948).

**The students' Autonomy Check**

The students openly acquiesced to the availability of sufficient space for them to behave without being subject to restraints in the content of learning. Accordingly, 52.4% and 21.4% of the respondents agreed and strongly agreed to the statement that they could select activities that sit their competency level respectively (=2.88, SD=0.86). As indicated, 52.4% and 19% percent of them agreed and strongly agreed to the fact that they got the opportunity to annex new ideas to the lesson while being taught respectively (M=2.78%, SD=0.92). As reported, 35.7% and 19% of them agreed and strongly agreed to the item that they are warranted to receive only the amount they are capable of acquiring respectively (M=2.54, SD=1.04). As agreed by 57% and strongly agreed by 23.8% of them, they could evaluate the way they learn M=2.92, SD=0.94).

They teacher's intervention has been positively considered in term of exploitation of autonomy pertaining to the space available for the error correction through their teachers respectively (M=3.09, SD=0.84). Likewise, the anxiety of getting penalized for language-related mistakes is recorded quite low in them. Therefore, 31% and 19% of them disagreed and strongly disagreed to the prevalence of such fear respectively (M=1.71, SD=1.29). This is further consolidated when 38.1% and 19% of them agreed and strongly agreed to the room available to correct their teacher in the instances of making mistakes while teaching (M=2.66, SD=0.87). As an overall note, it was highlighted that the respondents, 42.9% and 50% agreed and strongly agreed that learning English is an

activity generating content respectively (M=3.40, SD=0.70).

### Thematic Analysis

When compared with close-ended questions according to Friboury and Rosenvinge (2013), open-ended questions generate more elaborated data. Thus, the data gathered through the in-depth interview were transcribed by the two interviewers. After a long process of minute observation and restoring, the dataset was trained of outliers and trivial crumbs of data. Targeting and inductive approach, the data were coded and labelled across relevant themes: Curriculum related issues, Measures adopted and Autonomy at play. Curriculum related issues function as an investigative phase to discriminate any unsystematic or incongruent topics whose influence could dissuade wholesome instructional procedure. Cumbersome syllabus, contextual irrelevance of the activities, intervention by the authorities in certain adoptions, time restraints and influence imposed by the Teachers' Guide were some of the issues raised by seven participants while two participants representing primary education complained of no setback.

Measures adopted discuss about the solutions the teachers improvised in order to address those complications surrounding them. Participant 1 said "I tried to change the content to match with the level of students." She also mentioned that she did not use the text book and adopted self-made activities. The rest of them except one declared that they altered certain activities to suit the students. The participant 6 said that she did not follow the textbook whereas the participant 08 said that she did not teach the whole book and that she did it on a selective basis instead. The participant 7 said that she was not book-bound and enjoyed sufficient room to make adjustments to the lesson.

Autonomy at play is a directive to comments by the participants in respect of the autonomy in terms of decision-making. Participant 1 said "I can manage the syllabus despite problems". Participant 2 said "Though the curriculum is set by someone else, I can handle the class as a creative teacher". The participant 3 said "I have freedom to make decisions, I think theirs is autonomy in Sri Lankan curriculum". The participant 4 said, "I have power to make decisions, if we plan activities well, we will not have problems from ISAs". The participants 5 and 6 said, "We have autonomy of decision making". The participant 7 said. "Even if ISAs say we should select the activities to match with the level of pour students".

## DISCUSSION

Initially as an instructor, then as a teacher-researcher and a learner, according to Xu (2007), the teacher plays several roles rendering it hard to interpret what teacher autonomy actually refers to. Nevertheless, the group of Sri Lankan teachers who was subject to the survey and the in-depth interview confirmed that the ESL syllabus cum curriculum warranted significant space to exercise their free will as an instructor. This phenomenon draws a straightforward correlation with what Han (2013, 2017) posits as a core aspect of his 'professional freedom'. The teachers nurse & favourable attitude towards varied components of the syllabus; ranging from choices between activities and cutting across proficiency level-based activities. The degree of convenience integrated within the ESL syllabus necessarily coincides with the above. As long as a syllabus get liberating, grounds for independent behaviour are effortlessly formed. The sample explicitly discovered it stress-free and teacher-friendly. Fueled by this potential guarantee, decision making for alternative applications within the syllabus is enacted. As long as they

tend to perceive that certain tasks tend to be tedious and far from being practical to the target audience, they decide to dispense with some lessons which they gauge to be difficult to the students. Methods of evaluation may consist of formative, summative, individual assessments or even portfolios. If a teacher has to strictly adhere to a set of prescribed rubrics when evaluating their individual students who manifest manifold layers of knowledge and levels of performance, the reliability of such outcomes will have to be questioned. As indicated, the Sri Lankan context seems to welcome the teachers choosing methods of evaluation on their own. "If penalties are imposed on schools, educators…due to test results, critics argue, teachers will inevitably have less autonomy over the instructional process because they will be forced to teach to the test. This entails an implication to what they teach, the activities as aforementioned" (Education Reform, 2014). If the teachers are forced to adhere to testing for results, such a testing, in turn can delimit the knowledge a student is supposed to gain. The purpose, of education, students' capacity and teachers' autonomy are threatened consequently. Thus, as evident, local teacher are equipped with willingness and capacity to cater to the needs and interests of the students without confronting any significant inhibition from the system. This state resonates with Jing Huang's definition that 'teachers' willingness, capacity and freedom to take control of their own teaching and learning' (2005, p.4).

In-depth interview, being more exhaustive, strived to arrive at a more formative corpus of rigorous analytical data to draw conclusions on the interrelationship between the teacher and ESL syllabus. Changing activities, deflecting the textbook and creating activities were some of the tangible instances of decision-making. It is obvious

at this phase, that the local syllabus is not completely bereft of complications. Fortunately, they are not unmalleable. Both the freedom for decision-making as well as non-intervention policy exercised by the authority are outstanding elements of a problem-solving process.

Self-directed professional development and exemption from control are facets of teacher autonomy (Ian McGrath, 2000). Resource persons or educator officials are not mandatory part of the written ESL syllabus. Yet, their control in the system, if imposed, can sever the wholesome cord of rapport between the teacher and the syllabus because independence is cancelled to the extent of reactivating dependence. The teacher finds herself adhering to an administrative sermon and reduced to a conduit instead of a game changer. Charters (1976) coined autonomy in similar vibes as 'a psychological construct representing a teacher's beliefs about his or her freedom from external interference, pressure or control in performing the work of classroom instruction (P.211). The Sri Lankan officials seem to be permissive of the changes for the well-being of the student body or the facilitation of the teaching process. Nevertheless, data on the latter assumption are neither gathered nor discussed in the current study. To be autonomous, external pressure should be minimal.

In a still conventional classroom setting where the teacher-led content delivery recurs, the beliefs in an instruction mode independent of the teacher is still to be incur rated by the way constructing simulations and authentic learning modules. The essence of this is largely relatable to the local classroom and what Dickinson (1993) spoke of with regard to put-of-class independent learning; the learner is totally invested with the capacity to make and implement such decisions. If the teacher's presence overarching, it can

out shadow the students' full-packed agency within the walls.

It is likely that the students were pre-occupied with the teacher as an essential presence while responding to the survey due to the phrasing of the items and their general tendency to not to review the syllabus as absent of the teacher. In spite of such a possible partiality, they have rated the ESL syllabus as a positive mandate. Though the totally favourable frequency of responses might appear polarized, the fact that the majority of them are quite 'happy' learners of English in the classroom carries the nuance that both the teacher and the syllabus cause to predicate such as strong inclination. Another salient possibility, more or less a doubt, strikes when analyzing the rate of agreement to the item 'I get space to decide the amount I am capable of learning'. As far as the researchers are aware of the education system of the country, such decisions are not students share. They follow a prescriptive curriculum which seeks coverage at the end of the year. This elucidates the fact that the students should have been made aware of the systematic allowances within the curriculum and how autonomy is generated through the open doors. Holec defined learner autonomy as 'the capability of taking charge of one's own learning' (1951, p.4). The Sri Lankan ESL syllabus, in terms of space available to select competency-related content and self-evaluation methods tend to be flexible with the students so that they easily make decisions for themselves. It is further reinforced by their positive towards the teacher's role. They do not see the teacher as a coercion but as a medium of support for negotiation and clarification. Initially, the pursuit of the research was to locate which degree of autonomy the ESL syllabus comprises of. In case of the students, the teacher cannot be situated outside as he is often in the milieu and evidently, on the other hand, he or she

functions as the intermediary between the material and the student. Han's (2013) learner autonomy dynamics model constitutes of "support context". It is thus obvious that the teacher in the Sri Lankan context plays the role of instructor or facilitator actualizing such 'support'. The teacher is treated as an agent who is responsible for assisting the students to assume responsibility for autonomous learning in the domain of teacher and student autonomy. The Sri Lankan reality of this phenomenon is still to be studied in research at a larger scale. If in case of further research into the students' knowledge about the autonomy, it proves that the students lag behind, necessary measures should be initiated to train them to identify, grasp and implement strategic approached to such learning, specially by the way of employing metacognitive factors. Emphasizing on the teachers' involvement, Yang (1998) clarifies that the teachers can combine second/ foreign language learning with instructions on strategies helping them get acquainted with elements such as planning, goal-setting, self-assessment, monitoring and evaluation.

Both the teachers and the students are allocated of sufficient access to the ESL syllabus to investigate and move the bricks to create space where free movements are not restrained. Nevertheless, motivation through education can construct more autonomous teachers and learners equipped with skills to create more educated spaces of autonomy.

## *CONCLUSION*

This study aims to determine if the ESL curriculum used in government schools in Sri Lanka provides space to develop teacher and learner autonomy in the teaching-learning process. Teacher role is undoubtedly indispensable in the process since he or she is the prominent figure who

makes a bridge between the subject and the learner. The way he or she positions is a decisive factor in terms of success of the students. Teacher should create his/her autonomy in relation to the teaching approach, teaching styles, activities he or she uses when dealing with the curriculum. However, ensuring teacher autonomy in the curriculum leads teachers to make students assume a learner-centered atmosphere in the classroom. The current study on teacher-learner autonomy discusses several interesting and vital findings in relation to teacher-learner autonomy and the ESL curriculum. Systematic limitations such as influences made by the authority, activities which are not compatible with the student proficiencies restrict teacher autonomy when disseminating the knowledge to students. However, the findings demonstrate that despite systematic restrictions, teachers are autonomous to make any adaptations in the ESL curriculum which pertain to the current proficiency levels of students. This indicates the autonomy to make decisions in terms of the curriculum. Besides, it is proven that the ESL classroom ensures decision-making freedom of students. Students have positive attitudes towards the ESL syllabus, teacher role, and how the teacher provides freedom to students in the classroom. Moreover, students are free to choose competency-related content and self-evaluation methods which direct them to make decisions on their own progress. Overall, students and teachers declare that the ESL curriculum restrains neither students nor teachers. Reinforcement of teacher autonomy in the language classroom paves the way to strengthen and develop student autonomy even further. We suggest that future researchers could conduct research based on this factor. We also encourage local researchers to conduct a considerable amount of research based on teacher-student autonomy in the classroom.

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