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# Promoting Learner Autonomy in English Language Classrooms in Pakistan: The Role of Self-Regulated Learning and Technology Integration

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**ABSTRACT**
*The present study investigates the development of learner autonomy and technology-enhanced language learning (TELL) practices in English classrooms at Shaikh Ayaz University Shikarpur (SAUS) highlighting both self-regulated learning strategies/behaviors. Learner autonomy is a key concept in contemporary language teaching, as it requires our learners to be responsible for their learning. However, in Pakistan teacher centered and traditional approaches are generally dominant that hinder students to become an efficient controller of their own learning. Taking SAUS as a case study, this research seeks to investigate how SRL strategies that are supported by digital tools can foster learner-autonomy in an elite academic institution of Pakistan. In particular, this study looks at the impact of digital platforms and mobile applications on online learning. Study design involves gathering data through classroom observations, student and teacher interviews, surveys. The research highlights the major challenges and opportunities for promoting learner autonomy in university, suggesting that these strategies could be applied to similar processes of change at other institutions around Pakistan. The results reveal that the role of technology is quite supportive in SRL but without institutional support, teacher training and student motivation, self-directed learning may not highly function within ELT context.*

**KEYWORDS:**
Learner Autonomy, English Language Classrooms, Self-Regulated Learning, Technology Integration

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# INTRODUCTION

## Background of the Study

Learner autonomy is a central tenet of language education and revolves around the agency of individual learners in self-regulation, i.e., control over their learning (Benson, 2011; Khan, 2020). (Holec, 1981; Naseer, Zafar, and Riaz, 2022) suggests that autonomous learners are willing to accept voluntary control over the decisions in setting learning goals, selection of learning strategies and techniques, self-monitoring progress and evaluation outcomes. This also goes well with constructivist ideas on learning being an individual and self-critical process. The development of autonomous learning in English Language Teaching (ELT) is rapidly growing and more frequently considered to be the heart of successful language acquisition which might become particularly necessary for traditional, teacher-centred methodologies- dominant contexts.

Self-regulated learning (SRL) which is closely related to learner autonomy, involves using cognitive and metacognitive strategies thus enabling students themselves to plan their study process as well as monitor and evaluate it individually (Manzoor and Dastgir, 2023; Zimmerman, 2002). Research shows that SRL not only enhances learners' adaptability to challenges but also positively influences intrinsic motivation which often leads to a better academic performance (Pintrich, 2004; Shahid, Abbasi, and Gurmani, 2022). SRL strategies have been proven to enhance autonomy, language proficiency and learner capacity in the field of ELT (Oxford, 2017).

In this era of digital technology, promotion of learner autonomy can be implemented effectively through SRL. Students gain more confidence while learning because technology offers various sources of information and educational resources to help them study independently rather than being dependent on teachers (Reinders and White, 2016). These days, with the help of digital platforms and mobile applications learners can practice their language skills while they are on the go in a self-paced environment where they get instant feedback over quizzes which improves completion rate. This allows the students to assess their mastery via grading themselves at every stage. This is also in alignment with the research showing that that technology use in ELT enhances learner engagement, motivation and autonomous learning practices (Godwin-Jones, 2011).

In Pakistan, teacher-centered approach to ELT education has become more conventional in many institutions specifically those are running under public schools and universities (Siddiqui, 2018). This approach does not allow students enough time to engage into autonomous learning as it focuses on memorization and passive reception of knowledge. On the contrary, elite institutions like SAUS (SAUS) have a different story where modern pedagogical methods and digital tools are used extensively. Given the reputation and facilities of SAUS, it would be interesting to investigate how SRL strategies along with technology integration can enable autonomy in ELT for its learners with reference to self-regulated learning and technology integration. This study aims to uncover some of the issues and opportunities experienced by students as well as teachers in a top-ranking Pakistani institution practicing autonomous learning. This study will enrich the current literature on ELT in Pakistan and suggest ways to develop learner autonomy for accessible approaches at both elite and resource-deprived education settings.

### Statement of the Problem

Although there is an increasing concern for promoting learner autonomy in English Language Teaching (ELT) worldwide, most of the educational institutions are still rooted in traditional teacher-centered approaches that do not allow students to be independent learners. On the other hand institutions like the SAUS (SAUS) i.e., provide more contemporary pedagogical methodologies and digital tools to use it in a manner that can significantly support learner autonomy. Literature on self-regulated learning (SRL) practices and technology integration for promoting autonomous learning at SAUS is lacking. This study looks into the challenges and opportunities in learners' autonomy (with a focus on SRL technology) at one of Pakistan's top-notch universities to fill this gap in literature.

### Research Questions

1. How are the self-regulated learning practices implemented by SAUS for English learners fostering learner autonomy?
2. How is the technology integration in English Language Classroom for Autonomous Learning at University Level being utilize?
3. What problems do students and teachers encounter while implementing learner autonomy within SRL and technology at SAUS?

## LITERATURE REVIEW

A major movement in language education since the later part of the 20th century has been learner autonomy based on a central conviction that learners who manage their own learning are better placed to become successful at reaching target levels of proficiency (Benson, 2011). (Holec, 1981)describes autonomy or the learner as an autonomous person as an individual who has "the capacity to take responsibility for one's own learning", in particular with respect to setting targets of a learning process, deciding upon strategies while performing and assessing outcomes after finishing it. In English Language Teaching (ELT), it is considered that promoting learner autonomy encourages the emergence of independent learners capable to carry out their language learning process beyond the classroom. Although, it requires other factors such as a supportive learning environment that promoted self-regulated and access to the resources of learner autonomy (Little, 2007).

### Self-regulated learning (SLR) and Learner Autonomy

Learner autonomy can be linked largely with self-regulated learning (SRL), which includes the metacognitive, motivational and behavioral procedures individuals employ to influence their own awareness. SRL is a part model that involves strategies like goal setting, self-monitoring, time management and reflection which help students hold themselves accountable for optimal learning outcomes (Pintrich, 2004). Research suggests that SRL enhances pupil independence and boosts academic success, particularly within the language learning context where autonomous behavior is necessary (Hooshyar et al., 2020; Oxford, 2017).

The integration of SRL practices in ELT has shown beneficial effects on learners' ability to set personal language goals for themselves and monitor their progress towards these targets; meanwhile SRL helps them also be better at tailoring strategies they use to improve relevant aspects of the L2 skills (Dörnyei, 2001). SRL strategies can also enhance students' outside of class learning activities, such as independent reading and listening or use of digital language resources (Schunk and Zimmerman, 2012; Zimmerman, 2002). In most such traditional educational contexts, as is often the case among Pakistani social studies students (Chuang, 2021)(Nityanand Mairuet 2014), students are less frequently encouraged to use or perhaps trained in how best to apply SRL strategies. (Siddiqui, 2018) contends that the rote learning culture and examination-centered pedagogy in classrooms of Pakistan discourage SRL and learner autonomy.

### Integrating Technology in ELT and the Role of Learner Autonomy

Technology in Language Education shows the way towards learner autonomy along with online access to a broad array of language learning materials, immediate feedback for learners and the ability to learn at one's own desired rate.

(Reinders and White, 2016) Autonomous learning has increasingly been associated with software applications and online platforms, which are seen essential to ensuring the nature and availability of tools which facilitate autonomic activity (Godwin-Jones, 2011; Lengkanawati, Wirza, et al., 2021).

Technology use is relatively new in education sector of Pakistan, presenting a diverse scenario based on urban and rural settings (Shamim, 2017). At the university level, where internet is accessible to students at elite institutions like SAUS (SAUS) they have better tools to engage in self-organized learning. On the other hand, while some experts like (Khan, 2020) have championed for technology integration in English classrooms there is always an underlying factor as to whether student or teachers will be able make use of these tools if they are left alone. In Pakistani ELT situation, conventional recitation methodologies are still common (Wiraningsih and Santosa, 2020)(Ahmed Waqar et al., 2018), it is essential to find if these advanced assets are being utilized successfully in advancing understudy freedom.

## Theoretical Framework

The key theoretical frameworks on which this study was based are theory-of-self-regulated learning (SRL) and theory-of-constructivism. These frameworks complement each other in providing a basis for explaining how learner autonomy may be facilitated which draws on both SRL strategies and technology imbued learning activities within English language classrooms.

## Self-Regulated Learning (SRL)

(Taranto and Buchanan, 2020; Zimmerman, 2002) proposed a theory of self-regulated learning where learners are viewed as being actively involved in their own process of acquiring knowledge and they set specific goals. Students monitor progress towards those objectives by employing variety strategies. According to SRL, the importance of metacognitive, motivational and behavioral processes are highlighted to explain how students can become more involved in their own learning progress. The concepts of self-regulation theory: the one which shows that all these three phases are essential in a cyclic form (forethought — planning, performance —self-monitoring and reflection— Self-evaluating). (Pintrich, 2004) These phases are the key in developing learner autonomy because it encourages students to take responsibility for their own learning and adjust strategies based on feedback and self-reflection.

To study self-regulation as a social practice among SAUS students, researchers were guided by SRL theory to observe the deployment of varieties of practices that translate into goal setting, time management and judgements about their own progress within English language learning. This served as an analytical tool to consider how much students control their learning and in what ways this may or may not lead to learner independence.

## Constructivist Learning Theory

The constructivist learning theory(Piaget, 1970;(Vygotsky, 1978)) believes that learners actively create knowledge by interaction with their environment. The constructivist classroom teacher is not a transmitter of knowledge rather, the focus is on assisting students in discovering and constructing meaning for themselves. As such, learners are driven to take responsibility for and ownership of their learning as well as problem-solving making this closely similar to the philosophy underlying learner autonomy (Chuang, 2021; Little, 2007).

In a constructivist learning environment, technology mainly serves to provide learners with tools and resources which support hands-on exploratory and independent learning. Autonomous learning is made possible by digital platforms and mobile applications, where students can explore information resources in addition to practicing language skills and receiving feedback. The way teachers are using technology in SAUS to promote independent learning was explored and the approach through which students can virtually create their own digital knowledge via constructivist theory was also taken into consideration.

Based on SRL theory and constructivist learning, the paper aims to uncover the role of self-regulation by using technology, where it will add a useful source for enhancement as outcome in SAUS.

## Problems in the Promotion of Learner Autonomy

In Pakistan, promotion of learner-autonomy has some deep-rooted challenges. The dominant teaching style which is teacher- centered and largely relies on rote-learning is prevalent in most of the institutes of Pakistan. (Marzuki, Indrawati, et al., 2023; Siddiqui, 2018)These methods allow very little for independent thought. Further, teacher training programs in Pakistan may not sufficiently equip teachers to encourage learner autonomy or integrate SRL strategies into the teaching (Rahman, 2019; Wiraningsih and Santosa, 2020).

This is where institutions like SAUS come in – with more liberal and tech-friendly teaching methodology, there remains a huge scope for promoting learner autonomy. However, the effectiveness of such interventions is contextualized by a convergence between pedagogical practices and technology integration, in parallel to students' orientation toward developing self-regulated learning habits (Shamim, 2017). The implications for practice include the need to research how SRL and technology are being employed in developing learner autonomy at SAUS, as well as understandings of likely problematics that inhibit their optimal use.

# RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This is a case study which explores the promotion of learner autonomy in English language classrooms at SAUS while analyzing its effectiveness along with the challenges this approach offers. Case studies provides an empirical research strategy that uses a particular, in-depth understanding of the process involved as well to understand complex phenomena within their environmental contexts (Yin, 2018). Using a mixed-methods research design enabled collecting both quantitative and qualitative data to draw an in-depth understanding of self-regulated learning (SRL) practices and technology integration as facilitators for learner autonomy.

## Participants

This study included participants i.e., the students and teachers from English Language program at SAUS. The data was collected from teachers and learners of English language of SAUS i.e., purposive sampling technique. The sample consisted of 30 undergraduate English Language students at SAUS who volunteered to participate and were proficient in using technology in language learning. Five English language teachers who were are in charge of the English courses and had received initial training to integrate technology into their pedagogical practices were also chosen via purposive sampling.

## Ethical Considerations

The objectives of the study were stated to all the participants and their consent was taken. Throughout the study anonymity and confidentiality of the participants was maintained.

## Limitations

Since the findings of this study are very specific to SAUS, therefore these may not be generalized fully across Pakistan. Secondly, studies that rely on surveys and interviews to collect self-reported data run the risk of bias through a social desirability effect as participants may over report their employment of SRL strategies or exaggerate how often they use technology.

## Data Collection Tools/Methods

Students were given a structured questionnaire on SRL strategies, experience with technology in ESL learning and perceptions of learner autonomy. The questionnaire was based on previously validated instruments about SRL and learner autonomy(Pintrich, 2004).The questionnaire made use of Likert scale to record student self-regulatory practices, their level of engagement with learning from the perspective technology.

The qualitative data was gathered from students and teachers via semi structured interviews. The interviews utilized a phenomenologically-based approach to investigate participants' views on learner autonomy, the obstacles and advantages of SR strategies employed using SRL, and the enabler role performed by technology in independent learning. A search of teacher responses also focused on how they use technology in teaching, and what ideas they have for fostering student autonomy.

In-person classroom observations were carried out in order to assess instructional practices, technology use and student initiated autonomous learning behaviors. Classroom interactions were systematically documented with an observation checklist, for which the items are derived from SRL strategies and learner autonomy indicators. (Zimmerman, 2002).

# DATA ANALYSIS

The data, quantitative and qualitative both were analyzed for exploration of learner autonomy ascribed to self-regulated learning (SRL) practices combined with technology integration in English language classrooms at SAUS.

## Quantitative Data Analysis

Quantitative data generated from the student survey were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics. In doing so, the survey aimed to consider three issues: students' practice of SRL strategies, their involvement with technology in language learning and knowledge about learner autonomy.

## Use of SRL Strategies

Survey data showed that most of the students in this study reported applying SRL strategies to their language learning. The mean of self-monitoring and goal-setting was 4.2 (SD = 0.7) scored on the scale from one to five which indicated that most students monitor their own learning process when they learn English language by specific goals setting Time management and self-assessment were also relatively high, these had a mean score of 3.9 (SD = 0.8) as well as a

mean score of4.0 for time management. [3] PTSA was lower on the scale with more variance in responses when compared to LOKI which provided an evidence of an increased amount of agreement between students. The above findings provide insight into the readiness of SAUS students to participate in self-regulated learning as highlighted by SRL theory (Chen, 2022; Zimmerman, 2002) which emphasizes over learner-driven processes.

## Language Learning through Technology

Regarding the method of technology use, we observed a high engagement with digital tools and platforms. Seventy-five percent of the students indicated that they use mobile applications for studying in English at home, mostly like Duolingo, Grammarly Keyboard, osetta Stone and Memrise. Another 80% said that they used the internet for online content such as YouTube tutorials, podcasts and English resources in general. The average response for the question about students' understanding on how useful technologies are in enhancing autonomy was 4.3 (SD = 0.6) which shows that they have acknowledged an importance of digital tools to support their autonomous learning based on theories and practical experience.

## Learner Autonomy beliefs

Students were also asked about their Views on Learner Autonomy. The majority (70%) of students believed they had a lot of control over their learning process. The mean attitude score for this item was 4.1 (SD = 0.7); however, the differences were not substantially greater than those identified in many of the other items on that particular scale table and did not provide a strong evidence to explain some students' lower motivation to take personal responsibility for their education Thirty percent of students were worried about the lack of teacher guidance, they felt that structured input from teachers was essential to developing their autonomy.

## Inferential Statistics

This study carried out a correlation analysis between SRL, technology use, and learner autonomy. The results indicated a significant positive association between SRL strategies and perceptions of learner autonomy ($r = 0.76$, $p < 0.01$). There was also a moderate and significant positive correlation between technology use and learner autonomy ($r = 0.68$, $p < 0.01$). This finding reveals that both SRL and technology are attributing factors in promoting learner autonomy at SAUS.

## Qualitative Data Analysis

The qualitative data was analyzed from the semi-structured interviews and classroom observations using thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Through thematic analysis, several salient themes came forward in relation to the obstacles and opportunities of facilitating autonomous learning using SRL practices within technology integration as an educational tool.

## SRL in Practice

SRL was cited as especially important for learning a language as indicated by teachers. In the essay entitled Attaining Language Abilities In The Process Of Learning – A teacher student Dialogue, teachers shared that they motivated students to set their individual goals of learning language and cherished reflective endeavors like keeping a journal. Students did as instructed and employing these strategies helped them feel in control of their learning, and this feeling tended to help increase motivation and performance. Yet some pupils found time management difficult and also struggled to be self-motivating when not getting regular teacher feedback which could suggest a limit in how much SRL can develop.

## Technology and Autonomy

Technology appeared to be a vital factor that facilitates independent learning according to both teachers and students. Teachers provided them with web links to recorded lectures and other materials on platforms like Moodle or Google Classroom, which in some cases students liked, as the approach was amenable. As one student put it, "I really do appreciate the technology because I can work at my own pace... if [lessons] comes up in class and we don't finish... I just go home... and practice what I need to get done." Teachers also reported difficulties in making sure that students are actually using technology to their advantage. These students leaned on digital tools a little too much and had not fully internalized the appropriate cognitive strategies to develop true independence.

## Problems in fostering learner autonomy

Based on interviews and observations, a number of issues that act as barriers to the promotion of learner autonomy were identified. Students and teachers also explicitly noted the tension between independence and teacher support. Students appreciated the autonomy to drive their learning, but many also felt they were being left in a lurch and expected

more feedback and direction from teachers. Another teacher added "You want to give your students independence but at the same time you can feel like they are lost in their own learning. We also leaned on technology a little more heavily than we would have liked in some cases, substituting quick answers from resources outside of ourselves rather than fostering analytical thinking and independent problem solving skills."

# DISCUSSION

The implications of the results provided significant information on how learner autonomy may be fostered in relation to SRL strategies and technology integration through for English language classrooms. In conclusion, our findings indicated that both SRL and technology played an important role in successful autonomous learning skills development but some significant problems against its practices of self-regulated language learning were being proposed.

## Developing Self-Regulated Learning, Learner Autonomy

On the whole, data indicated that sophomores at SAUS were indeed applying SRL strategies relatively well with a noticeable emphasis on self-monitoring, goal-setting and assessment of one's performance. This supports previous research on the relationship among SRL, academic success, and self-directedness (Oxford, 2017; Zimmerman, 2002). The strong correlation between SRL and learner autonomy supports the idea that self-regulatory processes play a considerable role in learning to learn. Yet, time management difficulty and lack of motivation faced by some students indicated that SRL is not a blanket skill and educators need to continue scaffolding these skills.

## Using Technology as a Learning Tool

Both the qualitative and quantitative data focused on the role of technology in encouraging learner autonomy. The mobile app and online resources have high levels of engagement as these provide SAUS students what they need to engage independently with language skills practice. This agrees with earlier research that technology can help in creating a learner autonomous environment and the availability to countless learning materials enables individualized, personalized learning experiences (Godwin-Jones, 2011; Reinders and White, 2016). The data also shows that technology-enhanced autonomy is not a panacea; it cannot make up for an ineffective approach to learning. The dependency on digital tools in some students reveals that autonomy is about more than having technology at hand, it also encompasses a process of critical reflection with content along with reflective learning.

## Impediments to Promoting Learner Autonomy in SAUS

Many challenges surfaced when it came to encouraging learner autonomy at SAUS despite the promise offered by SRL and technology. The biggest impediment is the tension between autonomy and traditional teacher-centered practices. As observed in the interviews, students often expect more guidance and feedback from teachers oriented around tasks and this can impede their full acceptance of autonomous learning. This highlights larger issues pertaining to the Pakistani education system that still proffers traditional modes of instruction (Siddiqui, 2018). These results indicate that technology does indeed have a positive impact, but the manner in which it is integrated requires control to enable how deep students learn as opposed to passively consuming information.

## Implications for ELT in Pakistan

The case study of SAUS has far-reaching implications for English language teaching in Pakistan. The results indicated the importance of including self-regulated learning skills and technology into preservice teacher education programs, helping teachers to promote learner autonomy in their classrooms. Secondly, the difficulties identified in this study emphasize the crucial need to balance autonomy with suitable guidance and support when students are not wholly competent for self-regulated learning.

# CONCLUSION

The study strived to investigate the possibilities regarding promotion of learner autonomy in English language classrooms at SAUS by incorporating self-regulated learning (SRL) and technology. The results indicate that broad philosophical concepts such as learner autonomy are influenced by SRL, and technology provides an important enabling factor to meet the demands of narrowing achievement gaps. Likewise, through digital tools like apps and online resources learners can independently practice language abilities at their own pace.

Nonetheless, the study also uncovered hurdles to achieving learner-autonomy in one particular setting fully. SAUS students showed a high level of motivation and autonomy, yet expressed significant need for teacher support in their comments which showed at least some tension between traditional didactic practices (irrespective politico-educational ideal) and true SD learning. In addition, while technology provides valuable independent learning resources to students,

the meaningful use of it is not simply its availability; digital literacy skills are needed for learners to be able critically evaluate online content and utilize technological tools effectively in order to support deep learning.

To sum up developing independence amongst the learners at SAUS is about successfully balancing independent learning with the right kind of teacher support. Moreover, technology-enabled motivation to be autonomous has to go hand in hand with the development of critical thinking and metacognition skills. These lessons have implications for the practices of ELT in Pakistan and similar areas worldwide which are yet held under prevailing traditional educational approaches, and hardly benefiting from developing learner autonomy through SRL coupled with use computer technology. This also indicates a strong need to train teachers on how to utilize technology and use strategies to make their learners independent in the lesser developed educational institutes as the elite institute like SAUS indicated a need for proper support from teachers by the students.

# RECOMMENDATIONS

SRL strategies, including goal-setting and self-monitoring along with self-reflection should be integrated into the language learning curriculum more explicitly by educators. This can be done through proper monitoring by the teachers. In order to ensure effective promotion of autonomy on the part of learners, teachers need training in providing support for SRL and in using technology within their courses. Teachers could use a platform like Moodle or Google Classroom to help with providing resources, assignments and feedback which could allow students to work at their own pace while having a backup. Technology has an important part to play in enabling self-directed learning, but it is equally crucial that students are trained as discerning users of digital instruments.

While it is a great idea to prepare students for self-guided learning, we need institutions like SAUS and others work towards promoting learner autonomy by creating an environment where such independence is encouraged but only within the boundaries of appropriate guidance.

# CREDIT AUTHOR STATEMENT

**Mehwish Ajmal:** Conceptualization, Methodology, Data curation, Writing- Original draft preparation. **Fayyaz Ahmed:** Visualization, Investigation., Supervision. **Yasir Ahmed:** Software, Validation, Writing- Reviewing and Editing

# COMPLIANCE WITH ETHICAL STANDARDS

It is declare that all authors don't have any conflict of interest. Furthermore, informed consent was obtained from all individual participants included in the study.

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