Language teachers’ and learners’ beliefs about learner autonomy in a secondary school context: A mixed method study

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Justifications for promoting learner autonomy are manifold, as it is agreed that learner involvement in decision making concerning the learning process increases motivation and develops students’ critical self-awareness (Benson, 2013). As teachers have a central role in developing learner autonomy by creating a supportive classroom learning environment and given the influence teachers’ beliefs have on their practices (Borg, 2006), it is essential to gain insight into their views regarding learner autonomy (Borg, & Al-Busaidi, 2012). Similarly, learners’ perceptions concerning language learning influence their openness to the ideas presented in the language classroom, especially when these ideas are not in line with learners’ previous experiences (Cotteral, 1995).

The current study explored teachers’ beliefs and classroom practices concerning learner autonomy in a Hungarian secondary school, involving 9 language teachers. Mixed methods were used: classroom observations, attitude-questionnaires and semi-structured interviews revealed what teachers understood by learner autonomy and in what ways they claimed that they incorporated it in their practice. The study also looked into language learners’ beliefs and reported autonomous behaviors involving all the 9th graders from the school. Students’ questionnaire explored to what extent students felt responsible for improving their autonomy in language learning. Finally, the study intended to reveal correspondences and mismatches between teachers’ and students’ autonomous beliefs. Exploring these beliefs could lead to teachers and learners constructing a shared understanding of the language learning process, which is an essential foundation of learner autonomy.

References


Keywords: teachers’ beliefs, learner autonomy, students’ beliefs.