ENHANCING LEARNER AUTONOMY IN VOCABULARY LEARNING
RRITJA E AUTONOMISË SË NXËNËSVE NË MËSIMIN E VOKABULARIT

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PËRMBLEDHJE
Mësimi i vokabularit është një nga çështjet më sfiduese për nxënësit që mësojnë anglishten si gjuhë të huaj. Në të kaluarën nxënësit vareshin shumë nga mësimdhënësit e tyre, por metodologjitë e reja të mësimdhënies inkurajojnë autonominë e nxënësve. Në nivelin universitar studentët duhet të bëhen më autonom gjatë mësimit të fjalëve, duke u munudar që të gjejnë mënyra të ndryshme se si të bëhen më të suksesshëm. Qëllimi i këtij punimi është të hulumtojë perspektivat e ndryshme lidhur me autonominë e nxënësve, si dhe rëndësinë e strategjive gjatë mësimit të fjalëve. Po ashtu do të jepen edhe disa fakte pse mësimdhënësit duhet të rrisin autonominë gjatë mësimit për të përmirësuar njohuritë leksiokore tek studentët e tyre. Teknologjia kompjuterike dhe programet e ndryshme për mësimin e fjalëve mund t'u ndihmojë nxënësve të bëhen më autonom. Ky punim argumenton se janë tre faktorë kryesorë që duhet të merren parasysh gjatë të mësuarit në një ambient kompjuterik: kurrikula mësimore, mësimdhënësi dhe nxënësi.
Fjalë Kyçe: autonomia e nxënësve, mësimi i vokabularit, strategjitë e të mësuarit, universiteti.

SUMMARY
Vocabulary learning is one of the most challenging issues that EFL learners face. In the past the learners depended on their teachers but new teaching methodologies encourage learner autonomy. At the university level, learners should become more autonomous in learning foreign language vocabulary and try to find different ways of how to become more successful learners. The aim of this paper is to explore different perspectives related to learner autonomy and the importance of vocabulary learning strategies. It will further provide some facts why teachers should enhance autonomy in learning in order to enhance student lexical knowledge. In addition, computer technology and different vocabulary learning programs can help learners become more autonomous. The paper argues that there are three main factors to be considered in a computer-based learning environment that is the curriculum design, the teachers and the learners.
Key words: learner autonomy, vocabulary learning, learning strategies, university.

Introduction
There is no doubt that learning any foreign language requires learning words of that language. The words are stored and retrieved in the human brain. The learners should repeat the words if they aim to remember them and use them for communication. Language learning strategies are a central issue in teaching and learning, especially in encouraging learner autonomy, and many researchers (Oxford, 1990; O'Malley and Chamot, 1990; Chamot, Barnhardt, El-Dinary and Robbins, 1998; Harris and Grenfell,

2004) dealt with this issue. Language Learning Strategies are described by Oxford (1990: ix) as "actions taken by second and foreign language learners to control and improve their own learning and are keys to greater autonomy and more meaningful learning". The teacher should not impose his/her teaching strategies on the students but the teacher should encourage the students to choose different learning strategies according to their personal styles in order to enhance learning. Teachers and students should negotiate about including strategy training as a part of the regular instruction and try to experiment with different strategies in order to find those that fit the learning styles and personalities of the students. During reading classes, teachers face situations where students ask about finding the meaning of unknown words. The teachers should always try to prompt students with different questions in order to make them aware that they can use different learning strategies in discovering the meaning of unknown words. This is of a particular importance in the university setting where students have a lot of reading and writing tasks. Therefore teachers should offer the students a wide repertoire of learning strategies and let the students choose those that work best for them and encourage learner autonomy and independence.

The central issue in learning new words is understanding or discovering the meaning of the words when they are encountered for the first time. Recent teaching methods either rely on the context to make sense of the word or on traditional techniques such as pictures, explanation or translation into the students' L1. Some of the strategies used to discover the meaning of the unknown words are guessing from the context, dictionary usage, translation, and asking questions. The second step that follows the discovery of the meaning of the word is being able to remember the word so it can be used in future situations. Therefore, the retention strategies are used at the later stages of learning new words. It is known that repeated contact with unknown words which links the new word to an old one that exists in the learner's mind helps learners to retain the words longer in their memory.

Learner autonomy and vocabulary learning

Learner autonomy is an issue often debated by English language teachers and scholars around the world. Since 1970 many studies have been done on how teachers can promote learner autonomy and increase learner independence. Holec (1981), who is considered a father of autonomous learning, defines it as "the ability to take charge of one's learning". Little (1991: 4) is of the opinion that "autonomous learners are cast in a new perspective, have a capacity for detachment, critical reflection, and decision-making, take independent actions and are expected to assume greater responsibility for and take charge of their own learning". Thanasoulas (2000, para. 4) suggests that "autonomous learners have insights into their learning styles and strategies; take an active approach to learning the task at hand; are willing to take risks". For Scharle and Szabo (2000: 11) learner autonomy is "the freedom and ability to control one's own affairs, which involves the right to make decisions". Responsibility may also be understood as being in charge of something, but considering the fact that one has to deal with the consequences of one's own actions".

Harmer (2007: 396) believes that "it is possible that some learners to take the responsibility for what they do". When teachers train the learners to be autonomous, they need to offer them choices in learning strategies. According to Scharle and Szabo (2000) it is very important to find out students' level of knowledge and attitudes, their level of motivation, the learning strategies the students use and to get students to think about their own learning style. They believe that becoming an autonomous learner is a process which is divided in three stages: Raising student awareness, changing attitudes, and transferring roles. "Raising an awareness is the starting point /.../. The next step is practicing skills introduced at the previous stage in order to begin changing attitudes. /.../. Transferring roles to the learner requires a considerable change in

classroom management and so it may be the most demanding phase for the teacher" (Scharle and Szabo 2000: 9).

Learner autonomy can be fostered using various types of practices: resource-based approaches, which emphasize independent interaction with learning materials; technology-based approaches, which emphasize independent interaction with educational technologies; learner-based approaches, which emphasize the direct production of behavioral and psychological changes in the learner; classroom-based approaches, which emphasize changes in the relationship between learners and teachers in the classroom; and curriculum-based approaches, which extend the idea of learner control over the planning and evaluation of learning to the curriculum as a whole (Benson 2001 cited in Yildirim 2011: 313).

Many experts in the field agree that achieving autonomy with the learners is a long process which cannot be done immediately and I strongly believe that teachers should provide the learners with best practices and take into consideration many issues if they aim to promote learner autonomy in the classroom, especially in learning vocabulary. But, what could be considered as the main issue from the teacher's point of view is that learners' preferences do not match with the teacher's intentions (Harmer, 2007). For teachers, what seems to be engaging it can be difficult for learners to understand. For example, teachers consider debates as one of the most useful classroom activities, whereas the learners find it very difficult to communicate in English and making debates.

According to Shawwa, (2000, np.) "Learner autonomy is a great relief for students in vocabulary learning because it provides the learner with many privileges as: Learner autonomy enhances the learner's motivation and leads to more effective vocabulary learning; Learner autonomy provides learners with more free opportunities for English communication in a non-native environment; Learner autonomy caters to the individual needs of learners at all levels; Learner autonomy has a lasting influence; Learner autonomy enhances the learner's willingness towards active learning and learner autonomy enables the learner to master the basic skills that are required to lasting learning".

Being an autonomous learner means using different learning strategies. Nation (1997: VIII) suggests that learners need to be able to use vocabulary strategies to cope with unknown vocabulary met in listening or reading texts, to make up for gaps in productive vocabulary in speaking and writing, to gain fluency in using known vocabulary and to learn new words in isolation. Most of the strategies can begin to be developed in the earliest English classes.

Nation (1997) points out that vocabulary learning strategies should:

- Involve choice, i.e., there are several strategies to choose from
- Be complex, i.e., there are several steps to learn
- Require knowledge and benefit from training
- Increase the efficiency of vocabulary learning and vocabulary use

The overall task of vocabulary learning through is the distinction between knowing a word and using a word and it is very important that learning strategies include strategies for using and knowing a word. Vocabulary learning can also be a process of related sub-tasks and each one requires metacognitive judgment, choice and deployment of cognitive strategies. Every strategy used by the learner will determine in what way and how well a new word is learned (Gu 2003). For years, vocabulary strategy researchers have attempted to develop a taxonomy of vocabulary learning strategies. In 1997 Schmitt presented a list of such strategies. The basis of his taxonomy was Oxford's model (1990) of learning strategies based on six groups: social, memory, cognitive, metacognitive, affective and compensation strategies. However, Schmitt considered four strategy groups most useful for the purpose of his study: social, memory, cognitive and metacognitive.

Oxford's classification did not include many strategies for learning vocabulary. For example, there was no strategy for an individual to use when s/he attempts to discover the meaning of a

new word without recourse to another person's experience. For this reason there was a new category of strategies created by Schmitt, determination strategies (DET) and to this group belong strategies that are mostly used by learners whose English is their foreign language (Schmitt 1997). Teachers should develop student autonomy because vocabulary learning is unique to each student. In addition, the class time for vocabulary is extremely limited compared with the immense number of vocabulary items that learners need to acquire. All these points demonstrate that studying vocabulary on their own is a must for all learners, the best preparation the teacher can provide is to "help them become more autonomous" (Scharle and Szabo 2000 cited in Al Shawwa, nd.). Cohen (2000) believes that "teachers should act as change agents in the classroom–shifting the responsibility for learning more onto the shoulders of the students themselves, and taking on a series of roles as diagnosticians, learner trainers, coaches, coordinators, language learners and researchers" (Chuan, ND).

In environments such as Macedonia, language teachers have used old teaching methodology in which the students rely heavily on their teachers. Learning from the teachers as the only source of the information is not enough to spark autonomous learning. Instead, language teachers should change their teaching and move towards learner-centered classrooms. The current school concept in Macedonia is moving from being teacher-centered to student centered with the aim of developing students to be independent in their learning.

Conclusion

The paper discusses the importance of learner autonomy in learning vocabulary. The use of language learning strategies can enhance learner autonomy because they are steps taken by the learners themselves and the students should not rely on a teacher to learn new English words. Especially at Universities where the students have different opportunities to develop and improve their autonomy in learning vocabulary.

All English textbooks offer different activities which increase vocabulary learning and they also have access to web resources. It is believed that the internet improves student vocabulary learning and also learning autonomy due to the richness of resources available. Being a new concept in education, learner autonomy can be fostered by the teachers through the use of different approaches which need to be tailored according to the students' needs, interests and motivation. Learner autonomy consists in becoming aware of, and identifying, one's strategies, needs, and goals as a learner, and having the opportunity to reconsider and refashion approaches and procedures for optimal learning (Thanasoulas, 2000, para.4). The ultimate goal of any language teacher should be to prepare students for life-long learning and this can be done only if they become autonomous learners (Xhaferi and Xhaferi, 2010, ELSEVIER).

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