**5.The Learner-Centered Syllabus**

**5.1 Introduction**

The concept of learner autonomy has been widely discussed and generally recognized as a goal to pursue in the field of education in recent decades (e.g. Benson, 1996; Benson & Voller, 1997; Crabbe, 1993; Dickinson, 1992; Dam, 1995; Little, 1991).It has lately been noticed that within many educational contexts syllabus designers have tried to design syllabuses in such a way to shift the learning responsibilities from teachers to learners. Considering the priority of the learners’ needs; objectives such as raising learners’ awareness, allowing them to take decisions, encouraging them to choose what to learn, fostering self- evaluation, developing meta-cognitive learning strategies, were basically put forward. Such an approach to language learning has proved to be successful and ‘beneficial for all pupils’ (Trebbi, 1995 cited in Little et. Al. ………….) in many contexts and with many educators and language researchers who have undertaken experimental studies with learners at different studying levels, emigrant learners and even adult learners studying a foreign language for specific purposes. Perhaps some of the most influential figures who have undertaken field research in this area are (Dam,1995;Little and Dam,1998; Little, Ridley and Ushioda, 2002; Littlewood,1999; Benson,1996).These researchers do almost all consider that the learner should take in charge his/her own learning, no teacher can guess what is best for each learner, and no teacher can predefine the learning process and its outcomes. Thus, learners have to learn how to develop awareness about their own learning. According to Kelly ‘Teachers cannot distribute knowledge but only the raw material for knowledge construction[…]teachers can also provide good situations which foster social-interactive processes and provide individual learning space’(Cited in Little …………..).

**5.2 Assumptions behind Learner-centered Syllabuses**

There seems to be common agreement that the curriculum has a key role to play in the effort to implement a learner –centered approach in the classroom. When the national curriculum embodies traditional beliefs about teaching and learning and thus supports a view of teaching as transmission of knowledge, change in the language classroom is all but impossible, even for the most convinced and energetic teacher. In recent years, however, and mainly by the start of this millennium, the Algerian education reform has resulted in a new national curriculum that is more tuned to the idea of learner autonomy and more likely to promote innovation in the language classroom. So, what is behind this shift in the position towards the conception of learning in general and foreign language learning in particular?

As mentioned above, one of the main beliefs that led to the learner-centered philosophy is that, given the difficulties that prevail in most learning contexts, it is impossible to teach learners all the things they are supposed to know in class. In the same line of thought, Harmer (……………….) argues that, even if the teacher is very good, the learners will never learn a language, unless they do efforts to study outside the school walls as well as inside them. Language is too complex and varied that there is never enough time for teachers to cover all the learning points required for the development of their learners. Teaching class time is therefore to be used in as much an effective way as possible to teach those aspects of the language that the learners themselves consider to be most urgently needed.

Consequently, as one main aim or set of aims will focus on teaching language skills, other aims will relate to enhancing the learning skills. Such aims may include the following:

* to provide learners with efficient learning strategies
* to assist learners identify their own learning strategies
* to develop skills needed to negotiate the curriculum
* to encourage learners to set their own objectives
* to encourage learners to adopt realistic goals and time frames
* to develop learners’ skills in self-evaluation. (Nunan, ………………)

Advocates of learner-centered syllabuses are more concentrated on assisting learners to gain the communicative and linguistic skills that they require to handle real world tasks than acquiring the totality of language.

A great deal has been written in the last few years about the theory and practice of communicative language teaching. However, a basic principle underlying all communicative approaches is that learners must learn not only to make grammatically correct, prepositional statements about the experiential world, but must also develop the ability to use language to get things done. Thus, as stated in (Nunan,……………..) ‘class time should be spent not on language drills or controlled practice leading towards communicative language use, but in activities which require learners to do in class what they will have to do outside’.

**5.3 Critiques to Learner-centered Syllabuses**

The notion of implementing an approach to language learning that focuses on how learners learn and where the learner is supposed to be involved in the implementation of the syllabus design as far as that is practically possible, by being fully aware of the course they are studying is not that easy task to achieve both by the learners and the teacher in charge of those learners. Critics have suggested that a learner-centered syllabus seems to be radical and utopian in that it will be difficult to track as the direction of the syllabus will be largely the responsibility of the learners. In addition to that, without the mainstay of a course book, a lack of aims may come about (Yalden, 1987 cited in Ellis, 2003 ).Other researchers raise the issue of the difficulty of applying such kind of syllabi in large classes where the number in some developing countries exceeds 50 pupils (Renaud et al.,2007). Cortazzi and Jin (…………) raise the issue of the culture of learning that different societies are characterized with and that hinders the achievement of learner autonomy. Flowerdew et al, (1995), gave an example of such obstacle to the enhancement of learner autonomy stating that the Chinese students show respect for the teacher’s authority and think that the teacher should not be questioned, whereas western students value him/her as a guide and facilitator and believe that he is open to challenge.