Interruption, Introspection, and Inference: The Indispensable Concomitants of Autonomous Learning

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Abstract

Autonomous learning facilitated by technology is commonly touted as the pinnacle of independent learning. It is believed to offer learners a self-directed journey free from external influence. However, this perception confutes the intrinsic role of mediation when viewed specifically through Interruption, Introspection, and Inference (3Is). This paper argues that autonomous learning is never truly autonomous but rather a symbiotic interplay among 3Is, where 3Is play integral roles in guiding and transforming learners' experiences via an active dialogue. Through an exploration of selected literature, this paper elucidates how the presence of and interaction among these 3Is is indispensable for the efficacy of autonomous learning. Consequently, the notion of autonomous learning existing in isolation is debunked as a myth. The paper posits that the 3Is are the indispensable concomitants of self-directed learning. The paper will identify the myths surrounding independent learning and establish the purpose and role of 3Is. The paper will conclude with the necessity of offshoots of mediation -the 3Is for effective learning outcomes.

Keywords: autonomous learning, mediators, introspection, teaching, learning

Introduction

The shloka from Bhagavad Gita reflects the essence of a perspective often associated with introspection, wisdom, and a deeper understanding of life. Considering that in the darkness, distinctions and differences become less noticeable implies that the profound insights and deeper understanding of life possessed by the wise may seem obscure or even invisible to those immersed in the mundane humdrum of life. A pertinent question is whether profound insights are the consequence of the autonomy of 3Is, which is intrinsic to self-directed learners, or whether autonomous learning is a myth.

In the era of digital learning and modern education, the concept of autonomous learning is in vogue, often showcasing itself as the apogee of independent learning facilitated by technological interventions without external influence. However, the paper contends through established research and textual reference that the 3Is and external cues act as a guide to a more
comprehensive autonomous learning disposition and experience. The paper does not aim to prove the efficacy of 3Is in classroom settings but recommends it by highlighting its edifying impact on the teaching-learning process, illustrating from the selected literary texts.

Interruption, the first of the 3Is, represents the external stimuli and interventions that punctuate the learning process. The interruptive cues serve as catalysts for engagement and precursors of inquiry through inquisitiveness and prompting learners to delve deeper into their areas of interest. Introspection, or self-reflection, helps the learners assess their understanding, progress, and areas for improvement. The autonomous learner critically evaluates information, raising doubts and resolving them through further questioning for self-improvement. Such introspection helps learners to make informed decisions about their learning path. Inference, the final element of the 3Is, represents the cognitive process of drawing conclusions and deriving meaning. It ensures the acquisition and application of knowledge in diverse contexts, fostering higher order thinking abilities.

**Objectives**

- To define the purpose and role of mediation of 3Is in selected textual autonomous learning settings by identifying and scrutinizing the myths surrounding independent learning.
- To elucidate how the presence of and interaction among the 3Is is indispensable for the efficacy of autonomous learning.
- To exemplify through selected texts the efficacy of autonomous learning in a social and interactive setting supported by a facilitator and aided by the interplay of the 3Is, facilitating meaningful and transformative learning experiences.

**Literature Review**

Self-direction, integral to autonomous learning where learners take ownership of their learning and, through educational tools, engage in activities that foster their intellectual growth and development, is possible with 3Is responsible for high-order critical and problem-solving. Research findings suggest that “intellectual capacity, high order thinking skills and ability to remember and apply’ is necessary for problem-solving, which again is a necessary aspect of autonomous learning” (Arslan et al. 384).

Enabled by technology, this approach seems to offer learners unprecedented freedom and control over their educational pursuits. However, beneath the surface lies a complex interplay of elements that mediate and shape the learning experience. Another research finding suggests the necessity of “cues and ‘insights’” and warns against leaving the participant “totally autonomous” (Magni 65). In his research on a cognitive comprehension study of reading
comprehension, Solomons finds that “questioning” is crucial to comprehension (Solomons 135). Yet another research finding highlights the necessity of “venturing within, self-awareness and monitoring to truly understand the pedagogic choices” (Alleva and Gundlach 742).

Central to the understanding of autonomous learning are three fundamental elements: Interruption, Introspection, and Inference, collectively referred to as the 3Is. Research findings of Izumi-Taylor posit that “Hansei, or self-reflection,” is central to Japanese learning systems. The emphasis is on “rethinking or thinking in new ways,” highlighting that introspection is an integral aspect of ‘learner disposition.’ (87). While the traditional perception of autonomous learning suggests a journey devoid of external interference, the research results point at “external scaffolding by teachers” is much needed for a coherent autonomous learning experience (Masouleh and Razieh 841), affirming the importance of teachers, thus debunking the literal meaning of autonomy. Rather than existing in isolation, autonomous learning emerges as a symbiotic process wherein the 3Is play integral roles, facilitating and mediating the acquisition of knowledge and skills as well as the cues can be discussed by a teacher through an active dialogue aimed at activating 3Is ultimately help students take control of his learning process. Research also suggests that synergy between autonomous learning and metacognitive strategies is essential for both instructors and learners in the context of English for a specific purpose (Ajideh 167).

Autonomous learning can be understood as a conceptual framework in the field of education, reflecting the idea that learners can “take control of their learning processes considering the necessity of shaping and reshaping procedural knowledge” (Morales and Mena 119). The history of autonomous learning is marked by shifts in pedagogical philosophy and technology integration, fostering a more self-directed approach to education. The term “Learner's autonomy” was introduced by Henri Holec in 1981 as the “ability to take charge of one's own learning” (Learner Autonomy) and the ability to “both learn and use the target language” (Little 10). A “critical reflection is necessary to intercept the available historical knowledge for a greater degree of autonomous learning” (Mezirow 7). A useful precursor of clarifying the thinking process is the “cognitive disequilibrium” created by a teacher or situation to reorganize thinking (Herman 9) while Piaget refers to the “objectively conducted discussion that leads to deliberation or reflection” (Piaget 162).

Further, autonomy is understandable as long as it can permanently sublimate the subconscious into useful skills. (Vygotsky 5 124 252). This seems implausible, considering the dynamic nature of learning and self-transformation. Carl Rogers posited that “self-actualization is
possible within the “framework and freedom of self-directed program” (Rogers 78). Perhaps it is overlooked that autonomous learning cannot be purely autonomous owing to the indispensable concomitants of autonomous learning- the 3Is. However, it is claimed that in self-directed learning, individuals can take the initiative with limited help from the teacher (Knowles 68). The paper identifies that the prompt of such initiatives is the presence of 3Is within student disposition, which can be self-activated or nudged towards activation through external cues.

The effectiveness of autonomous assembly of resources under the “personal control of each learner” (Illich 50) overlooks that 3Is are the balancing catalysts of independent learning outcomes if channelized adequately and in full alacrity. The balance between “freedom and structure” is such as critical discussions, cues, and inquiry provided a safe learning structure to independent learners (Healey 2).

**Debunking Myths Surrounding Independent Learning**

Autonomous Learning equates to isolation. However, research suggests that while internet can promote autonomous learning by offering information, proper guidance can significantly impact the learner’s autonomy. (Esfandiari and Gawhary 71).

Contrary to the correlation with self-motivation, autonomous learning can be fostered through the development of intrinsic motivation by activating the introspective mechanism. Motivation is not a linear aspect, and there is a possibility of a “complex interaction of motivational variables” (Kormos and Csizér 295). Contrary to autonomous learning being an alternative approach that excludes traditional institutions, it “extends beyond traditional settings and requires the teachers to offer alternatives and freedom of choices to students.” (Mercado 192).

Autonomous learning equates to technology, but research suggests that despite the advancements in technology, teachers remain primary facilitators with increasingly limited control because students are “reluctant to be totally autonomous” (Reinders and White 151). Activating the internal concomitants of self-learning can lead to insightful learning without technology.

**Role and Purpose of Mediation**

The mediation of 3Is is intrinsic and ingrained in autonomously learning learners. They contribute to the development of metacognitive skills and promote critical knowledge about one's learning processes. Also, mediation can be used to promote “higher mental functions” (Fauziah et al. 17).
In autonomous learning, along with the active engagement of internal mediators, students can take control of their learning journey and may even achieve what is beyond and higher than scores-sagacity. As embodied in the first reference text, the ancient Hindu Scripture, the *Bhagavad Gita* where Arjuna is the student, and Krishna manifests as the teacher, facilitating the learning process through questions, cues, addressing skepticism, offering alternative perspectives as opposed to the singularity of Arjuna fortified knowledge. Thus, setting knowledge free from the shackles of the self-imposed singularity of perspective and guiding Arjuna toward autonomous learning via interruption, introspection, and inference. Krishna offers, and Arjuna receives an insight into the intrinsic metacognitive functioning of 3Is accessible to an alert mind.

Likewise, the second selected literature, Raja Rao’s *The Cat and Shakespeare*, is primarily the inquiry of an inquisitive mind that of the protagonist Ramkrishna Pai and the man he looks up to for higher-order thinking skills (like Krishna,) his intriguing friend - Govindan Nair. The critical camaraderie between both the protagonists and the interplay of 3Is serve as a catalyst towards independent thinking. Toward the end of the novel, Ramkrishna Pai reevaluates his initial obsession with building a three-story house, eventually rejecting it with a new perspective of the futility of a three-story house and replacing it with the idea of a two-story house with an open terrace.

> I would build a big house (TCAS 3)²
> I will never build a house three storeys high.
> …you must always have the terrace open. (TCAS 164)

A shift in perspective becomes possible only after deliberation, discussion, and conclusions. He exercises freedom of choice, which makes him a responsible learner who bears the responsibility for his choices, as is the objective of autonomous learning in a classroom. Likewise, in Bhagavad Gita, Arjuna is initially confused but gradually transforms from a feeble sceptical being to an enlightened and more knowledgeable being with higher thinking capabilities via 3Is in an active dialogue setting with Krishna, who constantly offers support like a classroom teacher by resolving his doubts and addressing his queries.

> अजुवि उर्ाच | दृष्ट्र्ेमां सर्जिां कृष्ण युयुतसुां समुपनसितम्||28|| सीदनतत मम गात्रानण मुखां च परिशुष्यनत | Arjun said: O Krishna, seeing my own kinsmen arrayed for battle here and intent on killing each other, my limbs are giving way, and my mouth is drying up (*BG* 1.28)
Arjun said: O Infallible One, by Your grace, my illusion has been dispelled, and I am situated in knowledge. I am now free from doubts and shall act according to Your instructions. (BG 18.73)

Research on student responsibility in autonomous learning found that students “surrender responsibility to teachers” and shy away from taking full responsibility (Üstünlüoğlu 160) underscoring the need to heighten the intellectual capacity of the teachers who act as the decision-making authority who at times does not give full responsibility to students. Interestingly, Arjuna is empowered to act out of his own volition due to the interplay between 3Is and Krishna’s - intellectual prowess is presented as mediating through his instruction, which involved enlightening and expanding Arjuna’s mind towards independent decision-making, as is the purpose of autonomous learning in a classroom, especially when facilitated by a well-informed instructor.

Offshoots of Mediation

1. Interruption

Which is to say? I ventured. (TCAS 12)

This venturing via active questioning is an interruption- interrupting to comprehend, learn, and question again. The role of interruption, coupled with active questioning, is a catalyst in the process of autonomous learning, drawing parallels to the constant questioning by Arjuna in the Bhagavad Gita. When strategically employed by learners, interruption becomes a dynamic tool to stimulate critical thinking, deepen understanding, and refine the learning process through constructive thinking.

In the Bhagavad Gita, Arjuna seeks clarification, challenges his understanding, and explores the nuances of wisdom through interruption. Similarly, in autonomous learning, learners can interrupt their thought processes or seek clarification from resources, mentors, or peers through active questioning.

Arjun said: O Shree Krishna, You praised karm sanyās (the path of renunciation of actions), and You also advised to do karm yog (work with devotion). Please tell me decisively- which of the two is more beneficial? (BG 5.1)
Interruption in autonomous learning involves the learner's conscious decision to pause, reflect, and question. It is a deliberate internal strategy vocalised through precise questioning preceded by active listening to enhance comprehension, clarify doubts, and promote a deeper engagement with the learning material. Interruption may include asking probing questions, seeking additional perspectives, or challenging assumptions to refine understanding.

But do you know what you want, what you really want? (TCAS 70)

Such questioning can also enhance metacognition, as it does for Arjuna in *Gita* and the protagonist Ramkrishna Pai in *The Cat and Shakespeare*.

…but to whom does the light belong? Light belongs to light. (TCAS 43)

Active questioning leads to insights about approaching problems and assumptions and refines thinking for greater clarity and accuracy. It contributes to the learner's intellectual growth and autonomy. Further, external mediation is more effective when nudged through an inquiring question.

Does not such a person who deviates from Yog get deprived of both material and spiritual success, O mighty-armed Krishna, and perish like a broken cloud with no position in either sphere? (BG 6.38)

2. Introspection

The journey of Ramakrishna Pai and his friend Govindan Nair aligns with the themes of edification of mind through introspective musings. He looks up to Govindan Nair for his insight into larger-than-life perspectives and develops his introspective contemplation.

For him, the whole world was one living organism…
for he was so concerned with everything. (TCAS 18)

Govindan Nair’s journey can be seen as a form of introspection, where he grapples with the complexities of his own identity leading to sagacious consequences of constructive and deliberate intervention of introspection.

You are bad because I am. You are good because I am. (TCAS 32)

Drawing a parallel to the Bhagavad Gita, Arjuna is encouraged to reflect on his duty, question the nature of his trivial yet by no means insignificant existence in the larger scheme of *Dharma*, and seek self-realization. The Gita emphasizes the importance of inner contemplation and self-awareness as a path to spiritual growth and understanding, where external is the manifestation of an introspective internal. Thus, more than merely using resources, internalizing them leads to the dissolution of doubts and a greater understanding.
Arjun said: Having heard the supremely confidential spiritual knowledge, which You have revealed out of compassion for me, my illusion is now dispelled (BG 11.1).

The act of introspection becomes a crucial aspect of mediation in autonomous learning, as learners, like the characters in these works, engage in self-directed inquiry to gain insights and metacognition into their motivations, beliefs, and the nature of self and knowledge.

When we have it, we have it not, because what is not is what we want. (TCAS 57)

By reflecting on their experiences, learners can identify areas for improvement, refine their approaches, and develop a deeper understanding of their cognitive skills and learning patterns. Just as Arjuna sets out to give up his duty but by the end of Gita, is ready to perform his duty of a warrior. Both use the 3Is to empower their learning outcomes. Interestingly, the response of external mediation awaits their questions. The answers await the questions. Thus, introspection highlights the internal catalysts of reflective exploration of autonomous learning in an active learning space of dialogue. It becomes a reliable tool for learners to navigate their educational journeys with self-awareness and purpose.

3. Inference

Life is a riddle that can be solved with a riddle…Thus, the world is connected. (TCAS 47)

As a mediator in autonomous learning, inference, or the ability to draw conclusions based on available information, is crucial to understanding. In ‘The Cat and Shakespeare,’ the narrative often employs symbolic and allegorical elements. While seemingly ordinary in his role as a clerk, the character of Ramakrishna Pai engages in contemplation and musings that go beyond the surface of his mundane life. The reader is invited, just like Pai, to draw inferences about the symbolic significance of the Cat, Pai, and Govindan Nair.

Similarly, in Bhagavad Gita, the reader and Arjuna are encouraged to infer the broader implications of duty, righteousness, and the nature of the self for their own ethical and spiritual considerations. Inferences drawn from the text become a guide for individuals seeking to apply Gita’s principles to their autonomous spiritual and moral journey.

Thus, I have explained to you this knowledge that is more secret than all secrets. Ponder over it deeply, and then do as you wish. (BG 18.63)
In autonomous learning in the classroom, when the learners do not know how to frame pertinent questions, it necessitates support and cues from the facilitator. Thus, inferences extrapolate knowledge to new situations fostering a deeper and more independent comprehension of the subject matter facilitated by the 3Is. The role of inference aligns with the idea of critical thinking, active engagement, and independently making choices for a deeper understanding of the learning material.

**Conclusion and Recommendations**

The significant repercussions of undermining these elements in autonomous learning manifest as a diminished capacity for independent thought, a reliance on surface-level understanding, and a lack of adaptability in applying knowledge to diverse situations, as depicted by Arjuna and Ramakrishna Pai. As students and learners, they were confused, indecisive, and feeble, but by progressively pursuing the 3Is, they became insightful learners with the cues from their facilitators.

Further, comprehensive autonomous learning promotes “self-understanding by inner voyage whose milestones are knowledge, mediation, and practice of self-criticism” (Delors 17) for effective learning outcomes. The paper has met its objectives, and through selected texts, it has presented the indispensable efficacy, presence, and impact of 3Is as a heightened and transformative learning experience. The paper recommends testing 3Is in empirical mode using quantitative methods to understand better the correlation among 3Is and their impact on self-learning outcomes. Thus, the autonomy of the 3Is makes the autonomous learning experience, at best, semi-autonomous because it is mediated either internally by the progressive learner or externally by an exciting and intriguing personality like Govindan Nair or Arjuna’s friend Krishna or anyone with an edified mind.

**Notes**

1. *Bhagavad Gita* Shloka henceforth abbreviated as *BG*
2. *The Cat and Shakespeare*, abbreviated as *TCAS*

**Works Cited**


