

LEARNER AUTONOMY: DEVELOPING THE NECESSARY SKILLS

The article aims at considering the skills essential within the framework of learner autonomy.

Autonomy is regarded as a specific construct, rather than a method or a form of work in ESL context. Learner autonomy is now defined as a tendency of redirecting the controlling role in the teacher-student relations. To be more precise, it implies a student's attitude to the discipline studied, which will result in building a new kind of a learner's identity capable of acquiring any necessary knowledge, making relevant choices, thus enhancing the formation of a learner's complete professional competence. This, in its turn, will require a choice of strategies and approaches to be applied to autonomous learning, as well as from both teachers' and learners' perspectives.

This suggests a dramatic shift in teaching foreign languages, involving transition from the traditional teacher-centered paradigm to a more learner-centered, as well as life-long, learning. It is speculated that an autonomous learner of a foreign language should be capable of: determining the objectives, defining the contents and progressions, selecting methods and techniques to be used, monitoring the procedure of acquisition properly speaking (rhythm, time, place etc), and evaluating what has been acquired.

With learners channeling the process of education, learner autonomy can be viewed as a self-directed process of learning which can be implemented with the help of language learning strategies: Memorization, Cognitive, Compensation, Affective and Social, and another strategy which is more consistent with the paradigm of autonomous learning – Metacognitive. Employed by the students, these strategies help them coordinate the learning process by planning, arranging, and evaluating their learning. Besides, students will be able to choose their learning strategies and change them if they are not suitable.

Key words: *autonomous learning, autonomy, foreign language acquisition, learner autonomy, metacognitive strategy.*

The fluctuating requirements for employment transform the system of education day by day, emphasizing a gradual shift to a more learner-centered, as well as life-long, learning.

Learner autonomy is now viewed as a tendency of redirecting the controlling role in the teacher-student relations. However, the structure of autonomous environment is still under much discussion.

The issue of learner autonomy, as well as autonomous work, has already been approached by a number of scientists worldwide (P. Benson, S. Blidi, H. Holec, D. Little, R. Oxford, H. Stern), who have analyzed various aspects of autonomous learning.

The question of immediate interest concerns the choice of strategies and approaches to be applied to autonomous learning and the ambiguity concerning autonomy from both teachers' and learners' perspectives, which constitutes the topical value of the research.

Thus, the present study intends to analyze and clarify the metacognitive strategies implemented by learners in their autonomous environment, as well as their choice.

Traditionally, learner autonomy is viewed following the well-known definition by Henri Holec as «the ability to take charge of your own learning... to have, and to hold, the responsibility for all the decisions concerning all aspects of this learning» [4, p. 3].

In this regard, various activities have become important for an autonomous learner who should be capable of fulfilling different tasks within their educational setting, among them being:

- determining the objectives;
- defining the contents and progressions;
- selecting methods and techniques to be used;
- monitoring the procedure of acquisition properly speaking (rhythm, time, place, etc);
- and evaluating what has been acquired [4, p. 3].

Being frequently exploited by teachers nowadays, the notion of learner autonomy has acquired many ambiguous meanings and fields of application. In the course of time autonomy in education has faced various requirements both fairly and falsely attributed to it as a consequence of being a too much sought-after subject. Among the much-varied ones, the researchers [1] distinguish the main three:

- The concept of autonomy is grounded in a natural tendency for learners to take control over their learning. As such, autonomy is available to all, although it is displayed in different ways and to different degrees according to the unique characteristics of each learner and each learning situation.

- Learners who lack autonomy are capable of developing it given appropriate conditions and preparation. One condition for the development of autonomy is the availability of opportunities to exercise control over learning. The ways in which we organize the practice of teaching and learning therefore have an important influence on the development of autonomy among our learners.

- Autonomous learning is more effective than non-autonomous learning. In other words, the development of autonomy implies better language learning [1, p. 2].

Self-directed learning implies different degrees of autonomy. According to the following stages [5], autonomous learning in foreign language acquisition requires from learners the ability to:

- fix the objectives;
- define the content and progressions;
- select the methods and techniques to be used;
- monitor the acquisition procedure [5].

Autonomous learners are usually characterized as those who are willing and have the capacity to control or supervise learning; are motivated to learn and are good guessers; are able to choose material, methods and tasks; exercise choice and purpose in organizing and carrying out the chosen task; select the criteria for evaluation; take an active approach to the task; make and reject hypothesis; pay attention to both form and content; are willing to take risks [10]. However, we may notice the emphasis on learner's side here and start questioning whether autonomy should be considered as a refusal of any management and instruction. The researchers state that «learner autonomy is not and should not be understood as a rejection of all types of guidance. The ability of the learner to properly perceive guidance is at the heart of developing autonomy» [2, p. 40].

With all the above mentioned in mind, it is safe to assume that autonomous learning should be implemented together with learner-centered strategies and approaches. To understand what strategies are best fit for it, let us overview learning strategies in general. Major language learning strategies are usually divided into five main types:

- 1) Management and Planning Strategies;
- 2) Cognitive Strategies;
- 3) Communicative-Experiential Strategies;
- 4) Interpersonal Strategies;
- 5) Affective Strategies [9].

In R. L. Oxford's strategies inventory for language learning (SILL): Memorization, Cognitive, Compensation, Affective and Social, she distinguished another strategy, which is more consistent with the paradigm of autonomous learning – Metacognitive. These strategies are «employed by the students to help them coordinate the learning process by centering, arranging, planning, and evaluating their learning, this helps learners to control their own learning. Students will also be able to plan what their learning strategies should be and change them if they are not suitable.» For example, looking through some familiar material and deciding in advance what to pay attention to [7].

One of the approaches that perfectly complement the agenda of autonomous learning is learner strategy approach that focuses on «learners making decisions based on their own preferences concerning a learning task rather than on the teacher making the decisions for them» [3, p. 16]. Within this approach, we witness the conflict between two issues essential to learner autonomy: freedom to make a choice and taking responsibility for it.

Regarding these circumstances, it is essential to state that learner autonomy helps to develop 3 different areas in learner-teacher interaction, as it tries to support:

- reflection and greater linguistic, metalinguistic, and metacognitive awareness of language and language learning;
- a communicator and collaborator, a learner (and teacher) that is able to cope with a variety of communication situations and partners in a second language;
- an explorer and experimenter with language who is willing to develop learning agendas, take charge of their learning, and assume responsibility for it [8, p. 4].

Nevertheless, we still have to face more questions: Who is in control of autonomous learning? Are students fully responsible for their learning process or teachers should be equally accounted for it? S. Bliidi suggests that «the responsibility of implementing autonomy is not only on the learners, but equally belong to other stakeholders in the education pyramid: the teachers and the management of HEIs» [2, p. 140]. That means that not only mutual responsibility is the case for autonomous learning, but also we need to acknowledge the presence of mutual control in student-teacher interactions.

The introduction of learner autonomy encourages developing new skills that will help learners to acquire the necessary knowledge and be able to continue expanding their knowledge bank way past their graduation –

which is the very essence of life-long learning. However, delving into the matter it becomes clear that the notion of autonomy is far more complex than it may appear. Various questions arise in the process of implementing learner autonomy such as the issue of control, freedom and independence in educational setting, the teacher's role and responsibility and the importance of guidance.

The problem of interdependence and guidance in autonomous learning may be a topic of further investigation.

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РОЗВИТОК НЕОБХІДНИХ УМІНЬ У КОНТЕКСТІ НАВЧАЛЬНОЇ АВТОНОМІЇ СТУДЕНТА

Стаття присвячена розгляду вмінь, необхідних для запровадження навчальної автономії у процес вивчення іноземної мови. Аналізуються характеристики поняття «автономія». Зміст поняття «навчальна автономія» тлумачиться з точки зору переорієнтації контролюючої ролі у відносинах між викладачем і студентом. Наголошується важливість використання, відбору та заміни студентами стратегій вивчення мов, оскільки це дозволяє їм координувати навчальний процес шляхом планування, систематизації та оцінювання свого навчання.

Ключові слова: автономія, автономне навчання, ініціативна освіта, метакогнітивна стратегія, навчальна автономія, стратегії вивчення мов.

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РАЗВИТИЕ НЕОБХОДИМЫХ УМЕНИЙ В КОНТЕКСТЕ АВТОНОМИИ СТУДЕНТА

Статья посвящена рассмотрению умений, необходимых для внедрения учебной автономии в процесс изучения иностранного языка. Анализируются характеристики понятия «автономия». Содержание понятия «учебная автономия» конструируется с точки зрения переориентации контролирующей роли в отношениях между преподавателем и студентом. Подчеркивается важность применения, отбора и замены студентами стратегий изучения языков, поскольку это позволяет им координировать учебный процесс посредством планирования, систематизации и оценки своего обучения.

Ключевые слова: автономия, автономное обучение, иноязычное образование, метакогнитивная стратегия, учебная автономия, стратегии изучения языков.

Стаття надійшла до редакції 28.10.2018.