Unleashing Potential Thriving with Efficient Autonomous Learning

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Abstract

Background: In the field of education, traditional teaching methods often overshadow the understanding of student learning processes. This paper explores how insight into effective learning techniques can enhance teaching strategies and promote autonomous learning, empowering students to take charge of their educational journey. **Specific Background:** In the context of increasing global interest in foreign language education, innovative classroom management strategies are essential. This is particularly relevant in Uzbekistan, where educational reforms emphasize autonomous learning as a key component of language education. **Knowledge Gap:** While the concept of learner autonomy is recognized, there is limited understanding of how it can be practically implemented to foster independent learning in diverse educational settings. **Aims:** This study aims to explore effective strategies for promoting autonomous learning in language education, focusing on how students can be encouraged to develop self-directed learning skills. **Results:** A survey of students revealed that the majority view academic achievement as the ability to work independently and critically assess their own learning. Students identified grammar as easier than speaking and listening skills, highlighting a gap in communicative language competencies. **Novelty:** This research underscores the importance of integrating technology and innovative teaching methods to support learner autonomy and address gaps in traditional language instruction. **Implications:** By promoting autonomous learning, educators can facilitate more effective and personalized language education, leading to improved student outcomes and lifelong learning skills. This study contributes to the understanding of how autonomous learning can be practically applied, offering insights into strategies that can be adopted across various educational contexts.

Keywords: learner autonomy, innovative teaching methods, training strategies, language education, educational reform

Introduction

Globally and in our country, there is a growing interest in learning foreign languages. Teaching the target language well and efficiently is highly regarded. As a result, every educator in the world considers teaching English to be an artistic skill, and every society now demands swift and innovative classroom management strategies.

Like many other nations, ours places a high value on advancement and growth. For instance, the teaching of foreign languages and classroom techniques are characterized as innovative and communicative for autonomous learning in the fourth area of Uzbekistan's Development Strategy for 2017–2021 (Art et.al, 2010).

To participate in, apply, monitor, and evaluate his or her own learning, which is often generated with the help of teachers, a learner must be willing to assume responsibility (O'Malley, 1990).

The most current and cutting-edge approach to language coaching is required in the twenty-first century as opposed to conventional approaches and less communicative strategies (Chan, 2015). The Decree of the First President of the Republic of Uzbekistan, titled "Measures on Further Development of the System in Teaching Foreign Languages," issued on December 10, 2012, addresses several essential aspects of language education. This decree includes the initiation of foreign language instruction starting from the first grade in secondary schools, the revision and enhancement of foreign language curricula and programs, and the provision of all necessary textbooks and manuals to both teachers and students.

On that account, fostering learners' independent or autonomous skills is essential for enabling them to learn. If they can operate independently and autonomously, they can retain what they have learned thus far. However, it was not until (Rubin and Babbie, 2008) tried to enumerate the traits of successful language learners that the idea of learner autonomy was completely developed.

By encouraging students to plan their own self-get access to learning resources and search for appropriate materials to build their own development, providing opportunities for self-study help students take more ownership of the responsibilities for learning English. The shift of focus in the classroom from the teacher to the students is known as self-access or learner-centered learning. Through self-access resources for autonomous learning, this change allows students to ultimately control their learning (Sheerin, 1996). The variety of language learning tactics that a person uses depends on his or her preferred learning style. Since autonomous learning is conducted by the students according to their interests and needs, it is predicted that this method will make learning comfortable and enjoyable for them. Thus, teaching and learning activities would be going smoothly. Students can learn effectively since the teacher is supported in presenting the lesson. It was anticipated that autonomous learning, which was based on the student's preferred learning strategies, would aid students in navigating the language learning process and in developing their sense of self, vision, and pragmatism as well as their freedom to express themselves. These qualities supported the kids' independent learning. Researchers like, (Holec, 1981); (Anderson, 1983); (Dickinson, 1995); (Benson, 2007); (Nadif and Benattabou, 2021), and (Gong et al., 2021) have all undertaken several studies on this topic.

Literature Review

Defining the term "autonomous" is essential to identify autonomous learners. The adjective "autonomous," derived from the Greek word "autonomous" (where "auto" means "self" and "nomous" means "law"), originates from a legal-political context. In contemporary usage, it refers to the ability to manage one's own affairs without reliance on others for decision-making and control (Broady, 1996). Autonomous learners, according to this definition, are individuals who take full responsibility for their own learning. The concept of an "autonomous studying style" dates back to Aristotle in 334 BC, who

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emphasized self-directed learning. Since then, the understanding of learning patterns has evolved, becoming widespread among learners today. (Holec, 1981) defines learner autonomy as "the ability to take charge of one's own directed learning."

(Thanasoulas, 2018) highlights that autonomy involves a shift from education as a social process to a redistribution of power in constructing knowledge and defining participants' roles in the learning process. Similarly, (Dickinson, 1995) characterizes autonomy as a condition in which the learner assumes full responsibility for all decisions related to their learning and their implementation. According to this perspective, autonomous learners are required to be self-reliant theorists with a thorough understanding of the learning process, encompassing its objectives, goals, methods, and materials.

Autonomy encompasses both decision-making and action; it involves learners taking responsibility for their learning by making informed decisions and executing them. (Little, 1995) notes that "learning autonomy" is often misunderstood as self-instruction. Activities such as group speaking exercises and project work are popular among learners, and fostering autonomy typically involves encouraging outside-the-classroom learning. Early on, assigning tasks that appeal to learners' interests and needs can help develop autonomy skills. These tasks should foster cooperation and meet individual preferences and requirements.

(Little, 1995) underscores the significance of engaging student teachers in decision-making processes to promote the adoption of learner autonomy principles in their future teaching practices. Moreover, educators should integrate strategy training sessions into their curricula to encourage students to practice and comprehend various learning strategies. The inclusion of portfolios in coursework can further enhance students' understanding of practical knowledge, teaching behaviors, and cognitive processes, thereby fostering autonomy.

(Benson, 2007) contends that while learners should guide their own learning and make independent decisions, it remains the teacher's duty to facilitate their progress in language proficiency. To achieve autonomy, learners must establish their own objectives and identify effective learning strategies. (Scharle and Szabó, 2000) define autonomy as "the freedom and ability to manage one's own affairs, including the right to make decisions," and associate it with responsibility, which entails managing the consequences of one's actions. Both autonomy and responsibility necessitate active participation and are intrinsically linked.

(Dickinson's, 1995) notion of learner autonomy suggests that students can become autonomous if they feel comfortable, energetic, and congenial during lessons. Utilizing varied teaching methods can prevent monotony and motivate students. For effective learning, students' interests and needs must be considered, and they should learn to take responsibility for their learning. Teachers should gradually allow students to exercise autonomy and incorporate creative activities into lessons.
Overall, language learning strategies are crucial for fostering independent language learning.

1. Autonomous learners possess a clear understanding of the material being taught;
2. Autonomous learners are capable of formulating their own learning objectives;
3. Autonomous learners have a comprehensive grasp of the material being taught;
4. Autonomous learners are adept at formulating their own learning objectives;
5. Autonomous learners select and employ suitable learning strategies;
6. Autonomous learners are capable of identifying and discarding ineffective strategies;
7. Autonomous learners engage in self-assessment or monitor their own learning progress;

Similarly, to Dickinson's perception, Chamot and O'Malley have also outlined the idea:

Direct strategy	Memory	Cognitive	Compensation
Indirect strategy	Metacognitive	Affective	Social

"Learning strategies are defined as ideas or activities that enhance learning outcomes." By definition, strategies are likely to be employed with awareness; otherwise, they would not be considered strategic. However, once these strategies become proceduralized, they can be performed without conscious awareness and still yield beneficial learning results (Van Lier, 2017). Cognitive literature and empirical research have identified three broad categories of learning strategies. These strategies are derived from theoretical frameworks and observations that students employ executive skills for learning tasks and strategies directly applicable to learning activities. Consequently, Rebecca Oxford classifies language learning strategies into two main categories: direct and indirect (O'Malley and Chamot, 1990).

a. Memory Strategies (helping learners remember new language items)
b. Cognitive Strategies (assisting learners in thinking about and comprehending new language items)
c. Compensation Strategies (methods employed by students to address gaps in their knowledge)
d. Metacognitive Strategies (strategies employed by learners to manage their own learning)
e. Strategies (deployed by learners to help students to feel better about a new language)
f. Social Techniques (used by learners to interact with other people)

Memory strategies involve creating mental images, utilizing sounds and visuals, thorough review, and incorporating physical actions in learning. Cognitive strategies encompass activities such as reading, memorizing, taking notes, and questioning. Compensation strategies address overcoming limitations in speaking and writing. Metacognitive strategies include planning learning activities, gathering information, self-monitoring, self-evaluation, and organizing learning processes. Additionally, metacognitive strategies focus on organizing and planning learning activities and evaluating progress. Affective strategies involve self-encouragement, anxiety reduction, and monitoring emotional states. Social strategies are categorized into asking questions, cooperating with others, and empathizing with peers. Language learning strategies are specific actions taken by learners to make learning easier, faster, more enjoyable, self-directed, effective, and transferable to new contexts. These strategies are crucial for learning English as a Foreign Language (EFL) because to become an autonomous learner, one must consider the following techniques:

a. Time management;
b. Organizing and managing to learn;
c. Planning your learning;
d. Analyzing and reasoning;
e. Encouraging and motivating your learning;
f. Intelligent guessing;
g. Evaluating your learning (Self-evaluation or peer evaluation).
h. Individual learning file reflection and organization.

Memory strategies involve creating mental images, utilizing images and sounds, thorough review, and incorporating actions into the learning process. Cognitive strategies include activities such as reading, memorizing, taking notes, and questioning. Compensation strategies address overcoming limitations in speaking and writing. Metacognitive strategies encompass planning learning activities, collecting data, self-monitoring, self-evaluation, and organizing learning. Additionally, metacognitive strategies focus on planning, organizing, and evaluating one's learning process. Affective strategies involve self-encouragement, anxiety reduction, and emotional self-assessment. Social strategies are categorized into asking questions, cooperating with others, and empathizing with peers. Language learning strategies are specific actions taken by learners to make learning easier, faster, more enjoyable, self-directed, effective, and transferable to new contexts. These strategies are essential for learning English as a Foreign Language (EFL) because to become an autonomous learner, one must consider the following techniques: Regarding research purposes, the quantitative approach aims to generalize findings, predict behavior, or provide a causal explanation for the research problem. Theory underpins the quantitative approach, which is characterized by data manipulation and variable control, often reduced to numerical analysis to identify relationships or correlations between variables (Ary et al., 2010). Quantitative researchers believe in an objective reality that must be discovered through research. The analysis in this approach is grounded in logical empiricism, striving to be as value-free as possible. In the context of autonomous learning, this concept can be applied to determine the degree of autonomy among students without any intervention.

Method

In this review study, a set of tight selection criteria were developed in order to address the research questions:

1. The primary focus of this research review is on the use of internet tools in language learning and teaching. Studies that employed internet tools in other academic fields or disciplines were excluded from consideration.
2. Empirical studies providing data obtained from genuine observations or experiments must make up research.
3. Published studies that only discussed conceptual framework, individual beliefs, or firsthand encounters were disregarded.
4. The study must explicitly identify the utilization of one or more internet tools. This review excludes studies that examine comprehensive courseware, such as Moodle or WebCT, or discuss any form of academic online learning programs without specifically detailing the use of internet tools within those courses or programs.
5. Research must present quantitative or qualitative data in at least one of the following learning dimensions: affective learning (i.e., the impact of internet use on student motivation, attitude, and perception); cognitive learning (i.e., the effect of internet use on student achievement and performance); and metacognitive learning (i.e., the extent to which learners become more independent and self-directed in their learning process). Papers that do not provide support for at least one of these three dimensions were excluded from the review.

Furthermore, in the research, a quantitative approach was used to ascertain the earliest stage of the development of learner autonomy among correspondence course students. In this regard, a questionnaire that comprised open-ended questions with free-form responses, closed questions with a single answer, and non-alternative questions with several answers was used to collect data. Answering questions with a yes or no choice required providing a lengthy response because, without explanation and extra information, the answer would not accurately reflect the situation. 145 students participated in the poll, which was voluntary and anonymous.

Results and Discussion

A. Results

According to the survey, 52% of students define academic achievement as the ability to work independently with study materials, while 38% consider it the ability to recognize one's own learning strengths and weaknesses. Only 10% of respondents provided an alternative definition, viewing academic achievement as a result of personal growth, progress toward goals, and awareness of what has been learned and what needs improvement. None of the 145 students surveyed regarded obtaining good grades as an academic accomplishment. This indicates that students do not necessarily associate their grades with the knowledge and skills they have acquired, highlighting their critical perspective on the relationship between grades and actual learning.

Are you satisfied with your academic accomplishments?
Is the following inquiry in the poll*?*
72% of the students who were polled chose "yes" over "no," 14% chose "yes," 12% chose "no" over "yes," and 2% said it was difficult to respond.

Who or what depends on your accomplishments? 87% of respondents said that both the teacher and the student are responsible for their academic success; 23% said that they are. The majority of students attribute responsibility to both the teacher and themselves, as evidenced by their responses.

An autonomous learner can reflect on their strengths and limitations in relation to achieving their goals. It appears that because 34% of respondents answered "yes" to this question but did not elaborate, students may struggle to identify the subjects they should focus on and those they find most challenging. The remaining 66% provided more detailed responses. Most students reported that they find English grammar relatively easy, but they struggle with speaking and listening skills. For instance, one student stated, "I perform well in written exercises in English, but speaking is difficult for me." Another student noted, "Grammar is simpler than other aspects of language learning, such as speaking and listening. Listening comprehension also presents challenges." Overall, students found speaking and listening more difficult than mastering the grammar of a foreign language.

Some students focus on improving their listening skills by watching videos of American, British, and German bloggers and tuning into radio stations that broadcast in these languages. Others practice using the syntax and vocabulary they have learned by speaking aloud during daily activities or by memorizing poems in these languages. However, many students find learning a second language challenging

due to time constraints and a lack of foundational knowledge. When comparing their primary language (English) with a second language (German), students often emphasize grammar.

Students also mention that speaking is tough for them, saying things such, "I don't have enough language to communicate my thoughts". I need to enhance my vocabulary. By examining these responses, we can infer that in the classroom, grammar instruction receives more focus, and that students typically complete written assignments, such as grammatical exercises. And remarks like "I am responsible and hardworking, therefore all that relates to the written form of assignments - I succeed well" are more indicative of a grammar-translation approach to instruction than "I do not always keep up with the teacher."

Only 12% of respondents reported that they frequently assess the work of others, while 15% do so occasionally, and 73% never evaluate their peers in the classroom. This is noteworthy given that evaluation is one of the most effective techniques for developing critical thinking skills.

As previously mentioned, the integration and use of information and communication technology (ICT) pose a challenge for fostering effective learner autonomy. When asked about the application of ICT in the classroom, only 4% of respondents were neutral, 29% saw it as a time constraint, and 67% responded positively. Regarding internet access in Kazakhstan, 93% of respondents reported having both mobile and home WiFi, while 7% relied solely on mobile devices. All respondents indicated that they have internet access at their institution, highlighting that there are no significant technical or financial barriers preventing university students from using the internet for their studies. Students have internet access both at home and during classes at the university.

In terms of digital educational resource usage, 60% of students reported using these resources always or occasionally, 22% used them only occasionally, and 18% did not use digital educational resources at all. These resources include online textbooks, dictionaries, reference books, online platforms, and courses. The results are understandable, given that correspondence studies suggest students largely self-study course material, making digital learning materials a crucial component of instruction. It appears that a significant portion of students is committed to engaging with the content covered in their classes.

Students have internet access and a positive attitude toward the use of information and communication technologies (ICT) in education. However, this raises the question of whether they possess the necessary skills to work with various service programs. All respondents reported being able to use Word and PowerPoint to create presentations. However, proficiency with other service programs is significantly lower. Only 13% of respondents have Wiki skills, 11% know how to use Quizlet or create a website, and only 4% have the skills to create podcasts. None of the respondents have experience posting their content on the Internet.

Several applications can aid in assimilating and memorizing material, prompting the question: "How do you work with vocabulary?" The use of authentic materials promotes reading and independent vocabulary work. To investigate whether our students were utilizing Web 2.0 service resources for vocabulary practice, we asked how they quickly learn new words. Only 6% of respondents create thematic series in Wordle, while 41% write new words and form sentences with them, 22% memorize them, 20% create flashcards, and 11% create flashcards on Quizlet. These data suggest that our students do not fully leverage the potential of Web 2.0 service resources for vocabulary learning.The ability to comprehend spoken foreign languages by ear, as well as the answer to the question "How do you build listening skills?" enhance the development of communicative and informational competences.

According to the survey, 34% of respondents independently listen to podcasts in a foreign language, 22% listen to podcasts and complete tasks related to them, 15% listen to songs in a foreign language, 13% watch feature or educational films in a foreign language, and 15% watch foreign language news channels. Despite listening being a necessary skill for completing assignments in both virtual and face-to-face classrooms, all respondents agreed that it does not receive sufficient attention.

Most Web 2.0 service programs that support the development of writing skills in a second language include social networks and blogs, which allow for the publication of reviews and comments. Additionally, wikis provide a platform that does not require specialized multimedia skills.

Do you write reviews or comments on social networks in a foreign language?

87% of respondents gave unfavorable responses, 8% rarely or never left reviews and comments in foreign languages, and 5% occasionally did so. Although students are frequent users of social networks, data reveals that they do not do so for educational goals.

Conclusion

The fundamental components of learner autonomy in contemporary foreign language education encompass several key elements. These include student-centered learning, which prioritizes the needs, preferences, and active involvement of students in the learning process. The introduction of innovative learning and evaluation methods is also crucial, as it encourages the adoption of new pedagogical approaches and assessment techniques that are more aligned with modern educational paradigms.

Moreover, providing opportunities for interaction is essential. This involves fostering dynamic exchanges not only between students and teachers but also among peers, thereby promoting collaborative learning environments. Creative activities play a significant role as well, stimulating students' imagination and critical thinking skills.
Personal development is another critical component, as it supports the holistic growth of students, nurturing their intellectual, emotional, and social capacities. Finally, cultivating a sense of responsibility in students is essential, as it empowers them to take ownership of their learning journey and develop self-regulation skills.

In essence, these components—student-centered learning, innovative teaching and assessment methods, interactive opportunities, creative activities, personal development, and responsibility—form the foundational framework of learner autonomy in contemporary foreign language education. They collectively contribute to creating an educational environment that is conducive to independent and self-directed learning, ultimately enhancing students' academic achievement and lifelong learning skills.

Originality Statement

The author[s] declare that this article is their own work and to the best of their knowledge it contains no materials previously published or written by another person, or substantial proportions of material which

have been accepted for the published of any other published materials, except where due acknowledgement is made in the article. Any contribution made to the research by others, with whom author[s] have work, is explicitly acknowledged in the article.

Conflict of Interest Statement

The author[s] declare that this article was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

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