

A Systematic Literature Review on Students' Autonomous learning

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Abstract

"The ability to take care of one's learning," according to Holec (1981) (quoted in Thanasoulas, 2000). The term autonomy has aroused great debate, as linguists and educators have been unable to agree on what autonomy actually entails. In fact, for philosophical, pedagogical, and practical reasons, autonomy in language learning is a desirable goal. The role of teacher, on the other hand, is suppressed. As absurd as it is to believe that an infant may grow up without the assistance of his or her mother, considering autonomous learning to be unfettered learning.

In the field of language teaching, teachers use a range of ways to assist students build autonomy by scaffolding them toward independence. Despite the fact that many practitioners do not regard autonomous learning to be synonymous with teacher-less learning, many practitioners see learner autonomy as synonymous with self-access and, in particular, technology-based learning. According to the author, if pupils are to be independent, there will be a great need for direction because the ability to take responsibility of one's own learning is not innate but must be taught. It would be nonsensical to claim, as Thanasoulas (2000) does, that learners enter the learning scenario with the knowledge and skills to organize, monitor, and assess their learning, or to make content or objective decisions. The purpose of this study was to explicate the idea of autonomy from philosophical and theoretical viewpoints, as well as to provide some pedagogical implications, in order to respect the teacher's role as the primary scaffolder in the educational classroom in solidifying learners' autonomy.

Keywords: Autonomy, liberatory autonomy, learning strategies, chaos complexity

1. Introduction

For many years, we have been told that autonomy is essential. According to Immanuel Kant, autonomy is the foundation of human dignity and the source of modality (cited in Hill, 1991, p. 43). As a result, autonomy has been lauded as a fundamental goal of education. Autonomy, like many philosophers' favorite terms, does not refer to a single concept; it implies diverse things to different people. "Little progress can be achieved in arguments about autonomy until these different conceptions are sorted out," Hill (1991) asserts. (Page 44)

Learner autonomy is interpreted differently in language education, and phrases like 'learner independence,' 'self-direction,' and 'independent learning' have been used to refer to related principles. It is worth noting that autonomy as a social process can be seen as a break from education as well as a redistribution of power in relation to knowledge formation and the responsibilities of participants in the learning process. There is a great deal of worry in the field of language acquisition regarding what approaches teachers may use to assist kids who are unable to develop skills to study, assess, and control their own learning (Ustunloughlu, 2009). A growing number of research papers are focusing on the causes of this failure, with several authors (including Rivers, 1992; Brindley, 1990) suggesting ways to improve. According to Brindley, one topic of research is autonomy, which is defined as the degree of responsibility pupils take for their own learning (1990).

2. Review of the Literature

In the last twenty years, the concept of learner autonomy has risen in prominence as a desirable end-state in many parts of the world. Palfreyman and Smiths (2003) list numerous reasons why it's important for language students to become independent: Learners need to take responsibility for their education and make the most of all learning opportunities, inside and outside of the classroom, since autonomy is a basic human right and because autonomous learning is more efficient than other forms of instruction (p. 1).

In order to explain the importance of student autonomy in language learning, Benson (1997) suggests the following three broad categories:

- 1.a "technical" perspective with an emphasis on unsupervised learning abilities or methods: distinct categories of action or procedure, such as "metacognitive," "cognitive," and "social" techniques outlined by Oxford (1990);
2. a "psychological" viewpoint, which places an emphasis on the learner's larger attitudes and cognitive capacities that allow for autonomous learning;
3. a "political" viewpoint, which places an emphasis on the learner's empowerment or emancipation through the means of education (Palfreyman & Smiths, 2003, p.3)

According to Omaggio (1978), there appear to be seven primary characteristics of autonomous learners:

1. Self-directed learners have awareness of their own learning methods and practices; 2. Be proactive in their approach to the learning task at hand;
3. Be willing to take risks, i.e., communicate in the target language at all costs; 4. Be good guessers;
5. Pay attention to form as well as content, i.e., value accuracy as well as appropriateness; 6. Develop the target language into a distinct reference system and are willing to revise and reject hypotheses and rules that do not apply;
7. Have a tolerant and outgoing attitude toward the target language. (Thansoulas, 2000)

Thanasoulas's paper (2000) "What Are Learner Autonomy and How Can It Be Fostered?" describes three knowledge and learning approaches and discusses how each relates to autonomy.

a) First, positivism, which holds that our knowledge of the world is a faithful reflection of reality. If teachers are the gatekeepers of this truth, then learning takes place when information is exchanged between students and teachers. This could lead to classroom dynamics in which teachers are viewed as the experts and students are treated as receptacles for the knowledge and experience of their instructors. Positivism, on the other hand, upholds the widely held view that knowledge can be discovered rather than taught, and that the "hypothesis-testing" approach to learning is superior (*ibid*). (*italics added*) Positivist approaches overlook the importance of encouraging learners to direct and evaluate their own learning, as well as the importance of fostering an environment where students feel safe taking risks.

b) According to constructivists, people make sense of the world by sifting through and rearranging the data at their disposal. Constructivism challenges positivism by arguing that rather than internalizing or discovering objective information, people restructure and reorganize their experiences to form their own knowledge. Since knowledge is something that is "built up by the learner," Constructionism "leads immediately to the notion that knowledge cannot be taught but only learnt (that is, created)," as stated by Candy (as cited in Thanasoulas, 2000). Constructivism has been shown to foster students' psychological forms of autonomy, including those that relate to their actions, beliefs, and motivations. Learner independence is crucial to building reflective competence, and constructivist approaches support and foster this.

c) Constructivism and the humanities' approach to critical theory both share the view that knowledge is constructed rather than discovered or imparted. It argues that knowledge does not accurately reflect the world as it is, but rather is made up of "competing ideological renderings of that reality embodying the interests of various social groupings" (Benson & Voller, 1997, cited in Thamasoulas, 2000). Students in this approach think critically about issues of authority and ideology and are seen as active participants in a social setting with the potential to affect positive change. A more social and political context is provided for learner autonomy within critical theory. Learners are able to overcome their own preconceptions and develop into independent thinkers and "writers" when they are subjected to the constraints imposed by the social context in which their learning is taking place.

According to Kumaravadivelu(2006), post-method pedagogy includes both the narrow and broad understandings of learner autonomy (2003, referenced in Kumaravadivelu, 2006, p. 176). While those with narrow perspectives stress students' cognitive abilities, those with broader ones emphasize their freedom from oppression. Fostering students' agency in their own learning is crucial in preparing them for success in higher education and beyond. Those in charge are responsible for establishing objectives, deciding on approaches, monitoring their implementation, and assessing their results. Many professionals may have a fixed notion that the role of the teacher is a lifeless one in the classroom. There is no one, simply defined conduct or condition of affairs that we can call "autonomy," but Little (1991) seems to have nailed it when he wrote that (1) autonomy does not mean letting students get on with things as best they can without a teacher, (2) autonomy does not mean letting students get on with things as best they can in the classroom, (3) autonomy is not something teachers do to students, i.e., it is not another teaching method, and (4) Autonomy is not something that students are taught; There is no one, simply defined conduct or condition of affairs that can be regarded as "autonomy" in education.

In contrast to the narrow perspective of learner autonomy, which sees learning a language as an end in itself, the broad view sees language acquisition as a route to liberation. In other words, academic autonomy is represented by the former, whereas liberator autonomy is represented by the latter. In the same way that academic autonomy helps students to learn effectively, liberator autonomy empowers students to think critically. (Little,2003, p. 177)

2.1 A critical assessment of the function of the educator

Numerous iterations of the idea of independence crop up in studies of second language instruction and acquisition. One premise is that there is a significant gap between how teachers and students view the processes in which they are both engaged, and thus how they conceptualize ideas like autonomy. The institutional and pedagogical learning arrangements within prescribed curricula are of primary concern to teachers exercising their discretion. For the purposes of this discussion, "autonomy" refers to the student's ability to make decisions that are ultimately within their own best interests rather than those of the instructor. Benson (2008) argues that the focus of learner autonomy should be on the students' interests and how classroom content applies to their lives outside of school.

According to Little (1991), student and teacher independence are interdependent. Little (1991) suggests that educators who wish to encourage student independence "start with themselves" by examining their own pedagogical tenets, assumptions, and practices. To emphasize, student independence does not mean that the instructor has no control over the material being taught (Thanasoulas, 2000). Teachers play a crucial role in encouraging student agency in the classroom by establishing a safe and supportive atmosphere. The belief that the classroom can and should be a site for democratic practices is another argument in favor of putting the focus on the students. Therefore, in this framework, teachers are not viewed as "bank-clerks" who deposit their own work into their students' portfolios. As opposed to what is taught in class, what is communicated to students and the community through their schools is what is known as the "hidden curriculum" (Loporchio, 2006 cited in Jacobs & Farrell, 2010, p. 18). Students may be less likely to learn how to

operate in a democratic learner-centered context or even how to insist on this technique if they sense they are being defied by this right if classroom practices are overly autocratic, even while schools and society talk about democracy (Jacobs & Farrell, 2010). Problems arise for humanist thought and action when attempting to value diversity and democracy, both of which are intrinsically linked to individuality and humanity. Hassaskhah claims that the notion that language instruction should be open to all members of the community is one that has been widely accepted for some time (2004). (p. 54). Autonomy is not a matter of being alone but of relating to others. Veugelers (2011) argues that it is people's situated agency. The people with whom one engages in social and political contexts are crucial to the growth of one's capacity for self-determination and humanity. Progress in areas such as society, culture, and politics can help people feel more empowered and connected to their fellow humans. The struggle for social justice in our societies, cultures, and governments is intrinsically linked to human development. Humanists hold that self-aware, critical citizens are essential to any society's ability to advance (Veugelers, 2011).

2.2 Learning approach and self-determination

According to Zimmerman (1998), "strategic learners" are students who are able to self-regulate their locus of control throughout the learning process. Students can develop the skills necessary to become self-regulated learners when they are exposed to the rewards associated with doing well on tasks, hearing about the successes of others, being persuaded persuasively, and being in a physically comfortable state (Ustunloughlu, 2009). Learning to recognize one's own learning style and strategies allows students to capitalize on their strengths and address their weaknesses (Benson, 2007, as cited in Jacobs and Farrell) (2010, p. 18). Research shows that our students may learn to successfully influence their own strategy utilization if we put an emphasis on learner strategies in second language instruction, so Jacobs and Farrell argue (2010). A learner's learning style is predetermined, but their personality is not as easily altered as their preferred learning method (Jacobs and Farrell 2010).

2.3 Autonomy and the complexity of chaos

To paraphrase Paiva(2006), autonomy is a socio-cognitive system embedded within the SLA system. It encompasses not only the internal mental processes of individuals but also the larger societal, political, and economic contexts in which they exist (cited in Paiva, 2011, pp. 63). Having the characteristics of a non-linear process, it is subject to periods of instability, adaptability, and change. This is not a permanent condition, but rather its end result. A key component of SLA is encouraging students to take charge of their own education and initiate a process of learning that goes well beyond the confines of a traditional school setting. Self-directed students "make use of linguistic affordances in their context and take action by engaging in second language social behaviors," according to the literature (p.63).

One's level of independence may shift, for instance, if one decides they want to do more independent learning. Writing from a complexity perspective, Paiva and Braga state, "Autonomy, in the context of

complexity, encompasses properties and conditions for complex emergence and is intrinsically related to its environment" (2008). Therefore, its dynamic structure determines how it interacts with its environment, as stated by Paiva (2011, p.63). There is mutual dependence and independence between the language learner agent and the target language, but the agent can also affect and be affected by the learner's own social practices. Despite the fact that "there is no single, universal theory of autonomy," as Murphy puts it, "there is agreement on the educational value of growing autonomy," and "autonomy can take a range of forms, depending on the learning setting and learner characteristics" (2011). (pg. 17))

2.4 Autonomy in the workplace: a practical guide

A teacher is necessary for students to develop independence; this is the same as saying they must adhere to a set of predetermined procedures. Putting it another way, "teacher-less learning" does not describe the autonomous learning process (Thanasoulas, 2000). Sheerin (1997, cited in Thanasoulas, 2000) argues that educators are pivotal in preparing students for self-access and providing the necessary scaffolding once they've entered it. Lack of teacher willingness or ability to "wean students away from teacher dependence" threatens students' ability to make decisions for themselves. Rarely is it easy for teachers to make the leap from information provider to counselor and manager of course materials. Specifically, Kumaravadivelu's 2006 book. *Meaningful (liberator) autonomy* can be encouraged in the language classroom through means such as:

- encouraging learners to assume the role of mini-ethnographers to investigate and understand how, for instance, language as ideology served vested interests.
- asking them to reflect on their developing identities by writing diaries... related to the social world
- helping them in the formation of learning communities where they develop into unified, socially cohesive, mutually supportive groups seeking self-awareness and self-improvements. •providing opportunities for them to explore the unlimited possibilities offered by online services and bringing back to the class their own topics for discussions, and their own perspectives on those topics. (p. 178)

Students cannot achieve such a lofty goal on their own, as Kumaravadivelu (2006) argues, because all those who create their educational agenda, notably teachers, must be willing to help.

Thanasoulas (2000) explains how to promote independence through self-reporting, diaries, assessment sheets, and persuasive communication. It is his opinion that there are two types of personal reports: introspective and retrospective. The purpose of an introspective self-report is to have students think about how they learn best, while the objective of a retrospective self-report is to have them consider how far they've come in the past. The use of self-reports is warranted if it aids students in becoming more cognizant of their own learning strategies and the importance of critically examining their own actions, aims, and outcomes. Thanasoulas (2000) argues that the second strategy, using diaries and assessment sheets, is meant to change students' views of themselves by showing them that their alleged shortcomings stem from an absence of efficient strategies rather than an actual lack of potential. In the second approach, students make use of

evaluation sheets and journals to plan, monitor, and assess their academic progress. As a result, they are better able to pinpoint problems and propose viable solutions. This strategy is based on the idea that students can be encouraged to reconsider their prior judgments by being shown compelling evidence about a situation.

Nowlan (2008) suggests keeping a journal and using the internet and other modern tools to help with language learning. Meanwhile, Rao's students have found success with the use of portfolios.

In addition to getting students involved in the assessment process, portfolios inspire students to take their English skills to the next level by fostering a growth mindset. Furthermore, portfolio evaluation incorporates all stakeholders—students, teachers, and peers—in the evaluation process, which allows for a more accurate reflection of the learner's strengths and growth areas. Portfolios emphasize growth, effort, and achievement while connecting learning, assessment, and instruction. Students can keep track of their processes of planning, learning, monitoring, and evaluating with portfolios. Self-directed learning, process facilitation, and student awareness of learning strategies can all benefit from this. (p. 120)

3. CONCLUSION

A central idea in this article is that educators should help students develop an introspective understanding of their own learning styles and strategies. On the other hand, autonomous learning does not imply the absence of instructors. The results of the survey indicate that the majority of students do not feel confident in their own abilities, are not willing to take responsibility for their own learning, and continue to place their faith in their teachers as the sole decision-makers in the classroom. The results demonstrate the importance of incorporating learner autonomy into language courses through the use of a systematic approach to instruction, delivery, and content.

Autonomy, as a socio-cognitive system, is not a stable state but a dynamic, non-linear process. Therefore, independent learners make the most of linguistic resources available to them and actively participate in social activities in the target language. Therefore, in order for students to eventually become self-sufficient, teachers must initially provide scaffolding for them to learn more efficiently. Without this, it will be much more challenging to gain institutional backing for independent learning and successfully integrate it. Teachers must also devote time and energy to their own professional development during this time. What kind of information is necessary for students to make decisions on their own? What kind of preparation is possible for teachers? The use of self-study materials, technologies, and resources requires students to be introduced to and guided through the process. Advisors at the Self-Access Center can point students in the right direction.

To summarize, the findings show that students do not consider themselves to be sufficiently independent in language acquisition, and thus teachers need to be able to guide students toward autonomy, as shown by the results. Rather than prescribing the learning process, teachers who value students' input, involve them in lesson planning, establish clear learning objectives, and encourage them to take initiative in their education are more likely to see positive results.

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