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**АВТОНОМИЯ И ИНДИВИДУАЛИЗАЦИЯ ОБУЧЕНИЯ КАК  
СОСТАВЛЯЮЩИЕ САМОСТОЯТЕЛЬНОЙ РАБОТЫ СТУДЕНТОВ**

**AUTONOMY AND INDIVIDUALIZATION OF LEARNING AS  
CONSTITUENTS OF THE INDEPENDENT WORK OF STUDENTS**

*The article considers independent work from the point of view of development of systems, tasks, innovative technologies for independent work and development of research skills of students. Many teachers and textbooks provide material to help learners identify their own learning strategies and to improve their own learning skills. Students can use innovative systems, in particular mobile technologies. This approach is based on a constructivist approach that helps to acquire communicative competence, critical thinking skills.*

*В статье рассматривается самостоятельная работа с точки зрения разработки систем, заданий, инновационных технологий для самостоятельной работы и развития исследовательских навыков студентов. Многие преподаватели и учебные пособия предоставляют материал для выработки стратегий и умений самостоятельной работы. Студенты могут использовать инновационные системы, в частности мобильные технологии. Такой подход основан на конструктивистском подходе, который помогает приобрести коммуникативную компетентность, навыки критического мышления.*

*Keywords: learner autonomy, independent work, individualization, innovation.*

*Ключевые слова: автономия обучающихся, самостоятельная работа, индивидуализация, инновации.*

The discussion of learner autonomy and self-access materials is not new. It was given fresh impetus in the 1970s by writers such as Carl Rogers who suggested that the best thing to learn was how to learn. A teacher who has in class some students who use a self-access mode of learning outside the regular class should regard this as a bonus not as a threat. They are likely to make more progress than other students but it is unlikely that they will work ahead in the class textbook and cause what the teacher might see as disruption. A useful approach is for the class teacher to show an interest in the work such students are doing and to encourage others who are not going to do so.

Many teachers and textbooks now provide material to help learners identify their own learning strategies and to improve their own learning skills, but this awareness becomes even more important when the learner is working alone. Firstly, the classroom teacher can help learners to see their class work and their work in the self-access as being complementary. For

example, a learner with spelling problems may be directed to spelling games or books, relevant computer work, picture dictionaries, or simply vocabulary lists to learn [1, 9].

Analysis of highlights about independent work includes a number of key and often interlinked themes:

- The nature of learner autonomy – how to define it and what it involves.
- The rationale for promoting learner autonomy in FL learning.
- The role of the teacher in learner autonomy.
- Institutional and individual constraints on learner autonomy.
- The meanings of learner autonomy in diverse cultural contexts.
- Individualistic vs. social perspectives on learner autonomy.
- The kinds of learning opportunities that foster learner autonomy [2, 214].

Sinclair similarly suggests thirteen aspects of learner autonomy which appear to have been recognized and broadly accepted by the language teaching profession.

1. Autonomy is a construct of capacity.
2. Autonomy involves a willingness on the part of the learner to take responsibility for their own learning.
3. The capacity and willingness of learners to take such responsibility is not necessarily innate.
4. Complete autonomy is an idealistic goal.
5. There are degrees of autonomy.
6. The degrees of autonomy are unstable and variable.
7. Autonomy is not simply a matter of placing learners in situations where they have to be independent.
8. Developing autonomy requires conscious awareness of the learning process – i.e. conscious reflection and decision-making.
9. Promoting autonomy is not simply a matter of teaching strategies.
10. Autonomy can take places both inside and outside the classroom.
11. Autonomy has a social as well as an individual dimension.
12. The promotion of autonomy has a political as well as psychological dimension.
13. Autonomy is interpreted differently by different cultures [2, 216-217].

The teacher can suggest objectives but should not impose them. Language learning is hard work and the self-access can provide that work and usually also provide feedback. Some learners, in fact, actually work harder on a self-selected task. Secondly, the teacher has the role of motivator. Many students become disillusioned with working alone, sometimes because they cannot think of what to do next or because they feel they are not making progress. The class teacher can provide motivation by enquiring about objectives and progress, or making suggestions about areas where work could be done. Some younger learners may become bored or even disruptive in a self-access. In such cases, it may be necessary to talk to the student to try to identify why interest has flagged. It may be that the student is allergic to hard work but it is more likely that he/she is disillusioned with the type of work on offer. Efforts can be made to respond by finding materials that may suit particular needs and interests.

Maintaining motivation in a self-access system is an on-going problem with some learners; but no more so than in the classroom. The preparation for self-access working may take place in the class. Classroom teachers must see themselves as an important link between public work carried on in class and in class-set homework and private work. It is equally important that students are conscious of this link [3, 12-13].

The terms 'autonomy' and 'individualization' are sometimes used by language teachers as if they were synonymous; but they refer to different concepts. Neither of necessity implies the other, though the two terms can be used together to form parts of a particular approach to language learning. Their implications for the tutor are not necessarily the same, and it is the purpose of this paper to look at the two concepts in relation to the role and responsibilities of the tutor. Autonomy (self-government, personal freedom) is, for the tutor, likely to be seen in terms of a value judgement. The autonomous self-directed learner, both in terms of language learning and academic discipline studied, is the idea. Autonomy in learning is generally given a high value in education systems. Thus the dependent student, who relies heavily on the sources of authority presented, and is reluctant to make his/her own judgements about the truth or value of what is presented as knowledge, is generally regarded as inadequate by educationalists.

Individualization in language learning does not by itself imply a value judgement. It merely refers to an emphasis towards the individual as opposed to the group (since for many

language teachers, group/class). Decisions about individual or group learning are usually made on a pragmatic basis. Decisions about individualization are generally tactical in nature, unlike decisions about autonomy, which are generally strategic and long-term. However, some decisions related to individualization may be strategic, in relation to particular theories of learning or views about the value of socialization as a learning tool.

Individualization can mean a one-to-one staff-student encounter, giving both participants a great amount of scope; or it can mean one staff member with a larger number of students all pursuing individual tasks, so that the amount of individual attention given or received may be difficult to control or predict. If we add the autonomy v. dependency axis, it becomes more complex. In theory, one might suggest that as the student becomes more autonomous, the student's arena expands and the tutor's becomes smaller. However, at the same time a very dependent manipulative learner in a one-to-one encounter can sometimes effectively deny a tutor any space at. At the left hand side of the grid one might question whether the tutor can have a counselling role with groups. Though an unlikely situation, some teaching methods may permit this [4, 75].

The roles of the tutor in a self-study course have been discussed on distance learning and emphasis is often given to the role of the tutor in facilitating social events to make the students feel less isolated [4, 78].

Autonomy is most pronounced in the students' freedom to choose their own groups, and to organize the set work. The actual tasks required did not permit freedom of choice as to what was done. Students would, one imagines, develop some conception of themselves as autonomous learners as they were required to do much of the work without the help of a tutor.

Individualization is an unusual example when one is looking at reasons for individualizing. The more common reasons for emphasizing individualization would, we feel, be to give greater staff-student contact or greater choice of task for the student. However, this particular decision has to be seen in the context of the choice between a more intensive programme for a selected few, or a much smaller programme for all [4, 80].

In many countries, self-access systems have become commonplace but there are also still contexts around the world where self-access and autonomy are very unfamiliar concepts. There is a considerable risk of failure in implementing self-access systems, especially because conservative perceptions of teaching and learning represent a major potential obstacle to

success. That risks involved can only be mitigated through systematic and will examine the rationale, design and impact of a programme aiming to support all involved with self-access systems. Self-access can support the development of more resourceful, independent learners who take charge of their own learning. It enables learners to meet their own needs and aspirations and adds variety to learning.

The most significant obstacle to self-access, though, seems be rooted in the beliefs about effective teaching and learning held by self-access stakeholders (users, coordinators, teachers and administration). The role of a teacher is close to that of a factory operator attending to the machinery that churns out knowledge into the empty heads of trainees and the possibility of choice, a key concept in self-access, is rarely considered.

Teachers with positive previous experience of self-access are much more likely to motivate their students to use it. It is essential that these beliefs and perspectives – and many other aspects of self-access implementation and use – are dealt with fully through training. Effective self-access needs systems and procedures: stakeholders need the opportunity to design, revise and have ownership of these systems and procedures.

Self-access needs systems and procedures to be in place, including needs analysis, learner guidance, counselling and feedback mechanisms. Too often, however, these procedures are imposed top down and require personnel to implement systems, which they may not fully understand, value or even like. Opportunities need to be provided for stakeholders to engage with resources. The provision of resources is often one of top down of all interventions related to self-access but all stakeholders benefit from familiarisation and engagement with those resources. Self-access implementers can contribute to the development of resources, and need support to enable them to do this. Effective self-access development requires support for and development of the problem-solving and evaluation skills of stakeholders. The process of development needs some difficult questions to be asked and challenges to be identified and solved.

The CPD (continuous professional development) helps to transform the traditional teacher-based teaching approach to more effective learner based language learning in the classroom. Innovation depends on people and not things. Resources are essential but any success has been just as much as a result of the development of the skills, beliefs and behaviour of stakeholders. No innovation can be successful unless stakeholders help to

identify and articulate their beliefs and, if appropriate, restructure them. A CPD awareness-raising activity enables to express and revise beliefs, and apply them in real-life problem solving and discussion of challenges.

Main principles of self-access innovation:

- Innovation needs to consider people's beliefs (on what makes effective teaching and learning) and provide opportunities for them to reconsider and restructure their beliefs.
- Innovation needs time.
- Innovation needs ownership.
- Innovation needs the involvement and commitment of all stakeholders.
- Innovation needs to be 'joined up'.
- Innovation needs to be accompanied by support for critical thinking skills.

Teachers need to be involved as much as possible in the design of systems, procedures, tasks and other self-access routines. This may take longer but has a clear advantage in providing a sense of ownership. Successful innovation needs to engage with the awareness of all stakeholders not only those working directly with learners. The support of administration is essential not only to ensure that processes are implemented but also to remind personnel what should be in place and to monitor change. A conscious aim is to help students critically evaluate systems and challenges and find solutions [3].

Students can use the internet for self-study purposes without the need for a teacher. Often learners will ask their teachers which websites they would recommend which they could use to improve their English. The internet, with its hyperlinked structure allowing learners to choose the material and which direction to go and to do this at their own pace, is in line with constructivist learning theory and enables learners to become autonomous, which is one of the skills students need to develop today.

However, without the guidance of a teacher, only the most motivated and perhaps those who already have a higher level of English will be able to make good use of the resources available in order to improve their language skills. Many students, and maybe particularly those who would need the extra practice, can feel lost or overwhelmed by the amount of material available and can become discouraged by this. Others might not know how to make use of the resources.

This is similar to the situation in which students use some technology proficiently every day for entertainment purposes or their work, but when it comes to using the same technology for language learning, they do not always know how. The default position of users is different from that of learners. The same is true for the internet. Students need training in how to approach online texts with hyperlinks, for example. They need training in developing critical literacy skills and evaluating websites, and help in appreciating different genres of writing.

Technology itself does not bring about autonomy but with the appropriate support, guidance, training, and scaffolding, it can help learners to gradually become autonomous. On the website, they are guided systematically through tasks that help them to understand the reading passage. Additionally, it includes links to relevant websites, where they can find more texts of interest to them and try out the same approaches on their own.

Another example for scaffolding online learning is to use Web Quests, which provide suitable content-based activities in which learning the target language and learning discipline-related content and skills are integrated. Such activities are based on a constructivist and communicative approach, which help students with communicative competency, critical reading, synthesising, and problem-solving skills [5, 101-102].

The students to access online course materials, the internet and podcasts might have used mobile technologies; they are more and more widespread and very relevant for many ESP and Business English students, who often need as much flexibility as possible in their courses. The technology is readily available for no extra cost and ESP learners use them daily in their professional lives, mostly in the form of mobile or smart phones and iPods, but also in the form of tablet PCs such as the iPad, which means they do not need much training in how to use the technology itself.

With modern smart phones students can use downtime to go through learning material, listen to a podcast, leave a comment on a forum discussion, or reply to an email from their tutor (for example, with feedback on a task). There are more and more specific language tools available for learners, who can use these tools to practise grammar, note down and review vocabulary, look up words, etc. However, particularly for ESP students, the more interesting uses of mobile technology will be for simulations of real work situations and for accessing learning material, podcasts, and internet resources, wherever students happen to be

and whenever they want to. Most importantly mobile technology allows for a situated learning approach because learning can take place in the student's actual work environment. As with any other technology, mobile technologies are most effective when they are integrated into a course rather than used haphazardly, so that students understand their value and see the relevance to their course [5, 109].

Thus a teacher-facilitator might be doing some or all of the following:

- helping learners to recognize their own responsibility for their own learning;
- helping learners to know their own individual language levels on entry;
- helping learners to decide upon their own individual objectives;
- helping learners to recognize their own individual learning strategies and to make suggestions directing learners to particular materials or activities;
- helping learners to become aware of what particular exercises are really teaching them;
- making suggestions about more efficient ways of practice or monitoring;
- making ratings of progress and comparing them with the learners' own ratings [3, 11].

In conclusion, it should be noted that for the effectiveness of the organization of independent work actions on the part of the teacher are aimed at:

- talking to students about autonomy and its value;
- encouraging learners to engage in autonomous behaviours;
- getting learners to reflect on their learning;
- using activities in class which promote autonomy;
- setting activities out of class which promote autonomy.

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