

What is Learner Autonomy and How Can It Be Fostered?

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ABSTRACT

The concepts of learner autonomy and independence have assumed an increasingly important role in language learning. An attempt has been made in this article to show first, what is meant by learner autonomy in the context of language learning, and, then, how we can move towards its development among language learners. It will be argued that autonomy is better seen as a process not as a product and it is also a sort of quality in language learners that can be at least partly learned through educational experiences and interventions. A reference will also be made to some of the factors that may enhance, or even militate against the learner's willingness to take charge of his or her own learning.

Keywords: Autonomy, Independence, Language learning

1. INTRODUCTION

Over the last two decades, the concepts of learner autonomy and independence have gained momentum, the former becoming a “buzz-word” within the context of language learning (Little 1991). It is a truism that one of the most important spin-offs of more communicatively oriented language learning and teaching has been the premium placed on the role of the learner in the language learning process (Wenden 1998). It goes without saying, of course, that this shift of responsibility from teachers to learners does not exist in a vacuum, but is the result of a set of changes to the curriculum itself towards a more learner-centered kind of learning. What is more, this reshaping of teacher and learner roles has been conducive to a radical change in the age-old distribution of power and authority that used to plague the traditional classroom. Cast in a new perspective and regarded as having the “capacity for detachment, critical reflection, decision-making, and independent action” (Little 1991: 4), learners are expected to assume greater responsibility for, and take charge of, their own learning.