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FOSTERING LEARNER AUTONOMY IN EDUCATIONAL SETTINGS

The article examines the concept of learner autonomy in foreign language education. It analyzes key definitions and components of autonomy. The stages of developing learner autonomy and the potential difficulties of its implementation in the educational process are described.

Keywords: learner autonomy, the role of the teacher, foreign language, responsibility, reflection

В статье рассматривается концепция учебной автономии в иноязычном образовании. Анализируются ключевые определения и компоненты автономии. Описываются этапы формирования автономии у обучающихся и потенциальные трудности ее внедрения в учебный процесс.

Ключевые слова: учебная автономия, роль преподавателя, иностранный язык, ответственность, рефлексия

In contemporary higher education, cultivating learner autonomy has become a priority within foreign language instruction. Researchers worldwide recognize the significance of this approach, though definitions vary.

The concept of “learner autonomy” emerged in Western pedagogical theory during the 1980s. The French scholar H. Holec first defined it as the “ability to take charge of one’s own learning” [1, p. 3]. This encompasses responsibility for setting goals, selecting content and methods, managing the learning process, and evaluating outcomes.

A more comprehensive definition of learner autonomy was later proposed in the works of the Irish scholar D. Little. The author views autonomy in the sphere of learning not only as responsibility for one’s own learning but also as the capacity for independent and self-reliant action, decision-making, and critical reflection [2, p. 4]. This capacity includes the fact that the learner develops a certain psychological attitude towards the process and content of learning activities.

L. Dickinson defines autonomy as a learning mode in which learners are fully responsible for all decisions concerning their own learning and implementation of those decisions, conducted without the presence of a teacher or learning materials [3, p. 11]. In his works, L. Dickinson considers the concept of “autonomy” in comparison with concepts such as “self-direction” and “individualization of learning”. The scholar believes that the most important characteristic of the educational autonomy of a foreign language learner is the adequate distribution of responsibility for learning something new in the educational process.

In her definition of learner autonomy, N.F. Koryakovtseva emphasizes the learner's ability to consciously carry out educational activities. In the course of these activities, the learner creates a personal educational product, reflects on, and evaluates their learning. An important component is interaction with the educational environment. The learner takes responsibility for the process and the final outcome, which is expressed in self-determination and personal development [5].

T.K. Tsvetkova believes that learner autonomy is "the ability to independently acquire new knowledge and improve the skills of mastering a particular academic discipline". Autonomy is "the ability to learn of one's own free will and without external coercion, which implies the development of such personal qualities as initiative, responsibility, and the ability to make effective independent decisions regarding one's learning" [6].

The role of the teacher in the context of learner autonomy is rather ambiguous. Traditionally, the teacher defines learning goals and objectives, serves as a source of information, transmits knowledge, and conducts reflection on the work completed by the learners, while the concept of learner autonomy implies that learners perform these actions themselves. However, this does not mean that learning in the context of learner autonomy occurs without the teacher's participation. E. N. Solovova emphasizes the importance of cooperation between the teacher and learners in the context of learner autonomy. Even with a high level of learner autonomy, the teacher remains an indispensable participant in the educational process. The role of the teacher undergoes certain changes; they rather perform the functions of a mediator, consultant, partner in foreign language communication. Within the new approach, the teacher must teach learners to acquire knowledge independently, to become their mentor. Learner autonomy implies equal responsibility of the teacher and learners for the results of the learning work [7].

The Chinese researcher S. Yang notes the following functions of the teacher in autonomous learning:

1. Organizer – the teacher is responsible for the effective organization of learning activities in the classroom, offering learners interesting tasks. Furthermore, it is important for the teacher to give clear instructions for the work.
2. Facilitator – the teacher supports the learners, creating positive motivation in them and helping them cope with difficulties. The teacher encourages learners to use the foreign language and corrects emerging mistakes.
3. Counselor – the teacher should serve as an example of effective communication.

Summarizing the above, it can be concluded that learner autonomy is a conscious process of learning in which learners independently and motivatedly make decisions related to various aspects of their learning activities. An autonomous learner should participate in setting learning goals, should show initiative in planning and performing practical learning tasks. Autonomy is the

capacity for reflection and the willingness to be proactive in self-management and interaction with others.

Autonomous learning activities can be present at all stages of teaching foreign language communication. In teaching foreign language communication, four stages can be distinguished: the preparation stage, the practice stage, the production stage, and the self-assessment stage. In the first two stages, learner autonomy is developed; consequently, these stages require the direct participation of the teacher.

At the preparation stage, the teacher should form a positive attitude towards the learning process, motivate learners for foreign language communication, introduce them to learning strategies that allow them to organize autonomous activities, and remove potential difficulties [8].

At the second stage (practice), the teacher teaches learners to choose their own styles of learning a foreign language and learning strategies suitable for them.

At the production stage, learners can achieve full autonomy, as at this stage they master techniques for independently organizing communication in a foreign language.

At the final stage, learners can independently evaluate the achieved results and conduct self-correction of the results or methods of their learning activities.

In modern conditions, learner autonomy is an integral component of the foreign language learning process, which is significantly facilitated by modern technologies: the Internet, computers, social networks, interactive platforms [4].

Nevertheless, it should be noted that the formation and further development of learner autonomy in the educational process may be associated with certain difficulties. Among the factors that hinder the formation of learner autonomy are the following:

- Decision-making may prove too difficult for learners;
- The teacher may be unprepared to share their responsibilities with the learners;
- Working in groups and pairs can be challenging if learners have never worked in such a format before or if they have difficulties with group communication;
- Excessive focus on grades;
- Insufficiently high level of proficiency in the foreign language.

Thus, autonomous learning is a qualitatively new type of education, the specificity of which is determined by the fact that a significant amount of time is allocated for independent work. Learner autonomy is an important motivating factor in learning a foreign language; it encourages learners to engage in active, conscious learning activities, increases their initiative and responsibility, and allows them to independently maintain and improve their language level in various learning situations under variable learning contexts.

Fostering learner autonomy is not merely a methodological trend but a fundamental shift in the educational paradigm that prepares students for lifelong

self-directed learning. The successful implementation of this approach requires thoughtful, systemic support from the educational institution, including the development of appropriate teaching materials, training for teachers, and the creation of a rich digital environment. Ultimately, cultivating an autonomous, responsible, and reflective student, capable of effective intercultural communication, becomes the key objective of modern language education, meeting the challenges of a globalized world.

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