

PROMOTING AUTONOMOUS LEARNING THROUGH ONLINE PLATFORMS: BENEFITS VS. CHALLENGES.

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Abstract. This article explores the theoretical foundations and practical strategies for developing learner autonomy in online education. The study examines the unique challenges and opportunities presented by online learning environments, emphasizing the role of self-regulated learning and digital tools in fostering independence among learners. Special attention is given to modern digital platforms such as Duolingo, Coursera, Khan Academy, and TED-Ed, which provide valuable resources for autonomous learning. Practical recommendations for educators include integrating learner-centered instructional designs, enhancing digital literacy, and creating supportive learning environments. The research aims to equip educators with the necessary tools to foster independent, lifelong learners who are well-prepared to thrive in the digital age. This article brings together ideas from academic research and real-world examples to offer practical ways to encourage independent learning. It looks at what has worked well in different situations and shares useful insights to help educators support students more effectively.\

Keywords: learner autonomy; online learning; language learning, online educational technology; digital tools in education; flexible education, lifelong learning.

Introduction. The rise of online and distance education has presented both opportunities and challenges for language learning. While online platforms offer increased accessibility and flexibility, they also require learners to develop a stronger sense of autonomy to succeed. This paper explores strategies for fostering autonomous language learning skills within the context of online environments. Drawing on current research in self-regulated learning and learner autonomy, the article discusses pedagogical approaches and technological tools that can empower language learners to take ownership of their educational journey when learning remotely. By examining both the challenges and opportunities of online language instruction, this thesis aims to provide practical guidance for educators seeking to develop autonomous, self-directed language learners.

Learner autonomy - the ability to take charge of your own learning - is crucial for success in technology-based environments. Without an instructor present to guide them directly, students must learn to use metacognitive strategies, stay motivated, and feel a sense of personal control over their progress.

One of the first developers of the concept of “learner autonomy” is considered to be Henry Holec, a member of the group of researchers working under the leadership of Yves Chalon, the founder of the C.R.A.P.E.L.. Henry Holec is said to be the father of this term who identified “learner autonomy” as 'the ability to take charge of one's learning'. (Thanasoulas, 2000) suggests that the term autonomy can be applied in five situations. “On a general note, the term autonomy has come to be used in at least five ways (see Benson & Voller, 1997: 2): for situations in which learners study entirely on their own; for a set of skills which can be learned and applied in self-directed learning; for an inborn capacity which is suppressed by institutional education; for the exercise of learners' responsibility for their own learning; for the right of learners to determine the direction of their own learning.” Other writers like (Little & Dam, 1998) in their "Learner autonomy: What and why?" highlight the importance of endowing learners with the skills of active participation in the learning process and

what is important to mention this should be done willfully by the students. “Learner autonomy, in other words, belongs together with the idea that one of the functions of (adult) education is to equip learners to play an active role in participatory democracy” This refers to students taking an engaged, autonomous role in their own learning experiences, rather than passively receiving information. Instead of simply following instructions or absorbing content provided by teachers, the learner takes initiative to direct and shape their learning journey. Here students are involved in the following processes:

- Independently exploring topics that intrinsically interest them
- Seeking out relevant resources and information on their own
- Collaborating with peers to discuss, debate, and learn together
- Designing their own projects, activities, or assessments
- Providing feedback to educators on how to make the learning process more meaningful and empowering

David Little sees autonomous learning in three versions. The first version, developed as part of a Council of Europe adult education project in the 1970s, sees "self-directed learning" as happening through interactive group work and discussions. It views learning as involving both social interaction and individual thinking. The second version, created by Henri Holec for a parallel language learning project, focuses solely on the cognitive and organizational aspects of learning on an individual level. It treats the development of learner independence and target language skills as separate processes. This led universities to view autonomous language learning as students working alone in self-access centers. The third version, designed by Leni Dam for language learning in classrooms, also sees learning as a social, interactive process like the first model. But because the target language is the main way of communicating, it sees learner autonomy and target language improvement as closely connected. This version consists of specific classroom techniques.

This is where it should be noted that, depending on the form of independent learning, it is necessary to mention the main aspects of this process. In my opinion, the first two versions or forms of autonomous learning that D. Little discusses are suitable for those who can independently determine the course of their self-learning. Build a clear plan of your actions based on the tasks that are determined by the student himself, can independently evaluate their knowledge and, based on this, choose resources and forms of training. Here we are discussing more an adult who already has some educational background, has the skills obtaining information and evaluating the relevance of the received data. He knows how to sift out the necessary information from the unnecessary, and, most importantly, which was already mentioned above, he is able to bear responsibility for his own learning process. As for the third type of independent learning, which D. Little mentions, it is currently relevant in all stages of education, starting from a very young age when children begin their education in schools. It is the third type of independent education that is gaining momentum in today's schools throughout the entire period that students are in schools. In contrast to the previous two types, here the student undergoes independent education under the supervision of a teacher. The role of the teacher, oddly enough, is of key importance. At this point it is fair to quote Davey Kathleen, who underlines that the teacher who creates the environment for learners to learn independently. "...it's generally the instructor's (or L&D team's) responsibility to promote learner autonomy techniques and teach learners how to study on their own. In short, not all students are natural autonomous learners. In most cases, educators or training teams must help them develop metacognitive awareness and discover learning strategies that work for them." A similar point was expressed by Oxford University and multiple other researchers "Teachers can help students to develop learning strategies through learner training in the classroom and this can take many forms." According to Davey Kathleen learning autonomously should be started as soon as school years "To achieve this level of discipline, analytical thinking, and self-awareness, teachers should teach

and promote learner autonomy as early as possible throughout the school years.” From the quote above we can also see a number of vivid benefits of developing students’ autonomous skills as well as independent learning itself.

Benefits and challenges of autonomous learning through online platforms.

Autonomous or self-directed learning approaches offer a range of important advantages for students. Kathleen Davey points out a number of advantages among which there motivation, flexibility, lasting influence, increased engagement (Davey K. 2023) According to the author autonomous learning can be highly motivating for employees, empowering them to take an active role in achieving personalized educational goals. However, this requires instructors and L&D teams to first help learners establish realistic objectives. With clear goals in place, employees can then progress at their own pace, freely implementing the learning strategies that work best for them. Crucially, the ability to self-evaluate without external pressure can be a significant motivator, especially in high-stress professional environments. This autonomy allows learners to take ownership and adapt their approach as needed. Yet, instructors must still provide the right balance of guidance, frameworks, and resources to support the independent learning process. By striking this balance, autonomous learning becomes a powerful strategy for professional development, leveraging the motivation and personalization of self-directed methods while ensuring necessary scaffolding for learner success.

Autonomous learning approaches offer greater flexibility for both learners and instructors. Instructors can adopt more of a coaching role, while learners take the lead in driving their own learning. Learner autonomy gives individuals the flexibility to personalize their learning strategy, self-evaluation, schedule, and progress-tracking. This results in a more effective, engaging learning experience.

Learning how to learn independently is an invaluable skill that will benefit learners throughout their careers. As continuous learning is crucial for professional development, the ability to learn autonomously is highly beneficial for both

employees and organizations. When learners gain autonomy, they can transfer these self-directed learning skills to any future training or learning opportunity. Autonomous learning relies on learners' problem-solving abilities, critical thinking, and forming their own opinions. This encourages deeper engagement, as learners can discuss and debate their findings. There is also a direct link between learning opportunities and employee engagement, as professional development helps individuals perform better and build confidence.

The benefits of autonomous learning make a strong case for organizations to cultivate a culture that empowers learners to take charge of their educational journeys. (Davey K. 2023) Daniela Ochoa Melendez also highlights such benefits like improve self-esteem, develop problem-solving skills, improve self-esteem (Melendez D. O, 2023)

It is traditionally believed that the teacher is the main resource for acquiring knowledge when the teacher speaks, shows, guides, checks and evaluates. But the development of technology has pushed humanity to change its approach to education. Now anyone who wants to learn can choose or vary the methods of obtaining knowledge. This also applies to training staff. It is no longer necessary for a teacher to be responsible for every aspect of his student's learning. Today, there is a growing need for student self-study. Today, it is not necessary for a teacher to be in the classroom to conduct educational process. Today, a teacher is not the main source for getting knowledge. Online and distance education has become very common in education, especially in language learning. Numerous virtual platforms offer accessibility and flexibility in learning, but at the same time they also require learners to be more independent and able to manage learning habits well.

One of the key advantages of online learning environments is that they can significantly boost students' autonomy. This is because online learning inherently gives students more control and flexibility over their learning process. In traditional classroom settings, students often have less say over the pace, sequence, and methods

of their learning. However, in online environments, students can typically access course materials, engage with content, and complete assignments on their own schedule. This flexibility allows them to take ownership of their learning and self-regulate their progress.

Additionally, online learning provides students with a wealth of resources and tools that they can independently explore and utilize. Rather than relying solely on an instructor's materials, students can seek out supplementary videos, articles, discussion forums, and interactive simulations that align with their unique learning needs and preferences. This encourages learners to become more proactive, curious, and discerning in their information-gathering.

Furthermore, the self-paced and self-directed nature of online learning requires students to develop essential metacognitive skills, such as goal-setting, self-monitoring, and reflection. As learners navigate online courses, they must regularly assess their comprehension, adjust their strategies, and take responsibility for managing their time and progress. This nurtures autonomy by empowering students to become the drivers of their own learning journey.

The flexibility, resource abundance, and self-directed nature of online learning create fertile ground for the growth of learner autonomy. As students navigate these environments, they have increased opportunities to take control of their learning, explore their interests, and develop essential autonomous learning skills.

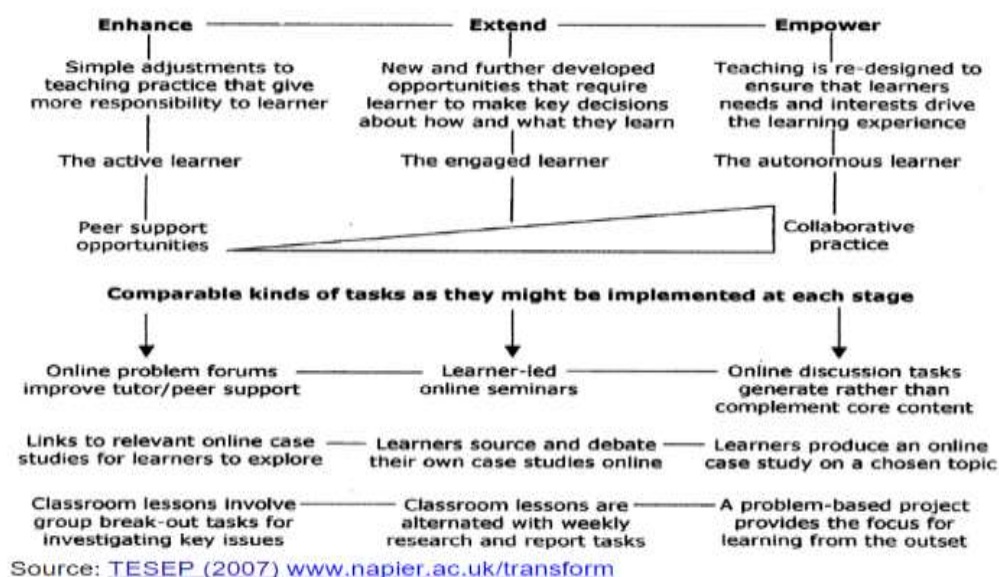
Leveraging technology to enhance autonomy comes with its challenges. They include both extrinsic impediments and intrinsic. Firstly, some young learners may not possess the digital skills required to use technology effectively. Secondly, access to technology can be limited, particularly in under-resourced areas. Lastly, students might become overly reliant on technology, which can negatively impact their social skills, essential for effective communication. For intrinsic obstacles the major one is the necessity for robust self-regulation skills. Online learning often demands a high level of self-discipline, effective time management, and metacognitive awareness

from students. Learners who struggle with these skills may find it difficult to stay motivated, on-task, and proactive in their online studies. Providing adequate scaffolding and support for developing self-regulation is crucial. Another significant obstacle is the potential for experiencing isolation or disconnection. In the absence of social cues and peer interactions typical of a traditional classroom, some students might feel a diminished sense of community and find it challenging to sustain a feeling of belonging.. This can undermine their autonomy and intrinsic motivation. Integrating opportunities for online collaboration, discussion, and instructor-student interactions is important to mitigate this challenge. The vast array of online resources can also pose a significant challenge for learner autonomy. While it offers many options, it can overwhelm students and make it difficult for them to identify reliable and relevant information. Developing digital literacy and critical evaluation skills is essential to enable students to navigate this landscape effectively. Furthermore, the asynchronous and self-paced nature of many online courses means that instructors have less direct oversight and ability to provide real-time feedback. This can make it challenging for them to monitor student progress, identify struggles, and intervene in a timely manner. Implementing robust assessment and check-in strategies is crucial to ensure learners stay on track. Lastly, technological barriers and inequitable access to devices, connectivity, and digital skills can create significant obstacles for some students, limiting their ability to engage in autonomous online learning. Addressing these digital divides is a critical concern for fostering learner autonomy in online environments.

Overall, while online learning holds great potential for cultivating autonomous learning behaviors, educators must be attentive to these challenges and strategically design learning experiences that provide the necessary scaffolding, support, and resources for students to develop and thrive as self-directed learners.

Practical strategies for promoting learner autonomy online.

The 3E Approach outlined in the diagram is designed to illustrate a continuum of stages in teaching practices, aiming to progressively enhance, extend, and empower student learning experiences. The model highlights how simple adjustments to teaching can initially give more responsibility to learners (Enhance), develop new opportunities for learners to make key decisions about their learning (Extend), and ultimately redesign teaching to ensure that learners' needs and interests drive the learning process (Empower). Each stage fosters increasing levels of learner engagement and autonomy, supported by collaborative practices and peer support. The diagram also provides examples of comparable tasks that can be implemented at each stage, showing a progression from online problem forums and peer support to learner-led online seminars and ultimately to autonomous, collaborative, and problem-based learning projects. This approach aims to promote active, engaged, and autonomous learners through a structured yet flexible teaching strategy, effectively correlating with the development of autonomous learning strategies.



The 3E Approach can be applied within classroom education, but can be extended to out-of-class learning as well. By progressively enhancing, extending, and empowering student learning, this approach fosters a learning environment that transcends traditional classroom boundaries. In-class activities like peer support and

collaborative practice lay the groundwork for learner-led initiatives and online discussions that can continue outside of the classroom, promoting continuous and autonomous learning. The integration of online seminars, research tasks, and problem-based projects further illustrates how this approach can bridge in-class and out-of-class education, encouraging students to take an active role in their learning journey at all times.

Technology-Enabled Learning.

Understanding the link between autonomy and technology in learning involves recognizing how technology can boost learner independence. With a wide array of tools and resources available, technology enables students to improve their practical skills, promoting self-directed learning and giving them more control over their educational process.

According to Villanueva, Ruiz-Madrid, and Luzón (2010), technology serves as a catalyst for learning and practicing exercises by providing greater access to authentic learning materials. It enhances interaction between users and various sources, improves metacognitive abilities through self-directed learning experiences, and facilitates information sharing and discussions on important topics. Technology also improves students' access to new scientific inquiry methods, fosters a self-directed learning mentality to achieve specific goals, and encourages collaborative learning and independent study (Benson, 2011)

Lynch (2017) states that utilizing blogging can motivate students to give and receive feedback with teacher oversight. Teachers can also connect students with professionals globally through Skype, FaceTime, or Google Hangout, providing them with real-world perspectives on different careers.

Today, educators have a wealth of online platforms at their disposal to enhance autonomous learning among students. In this regard, it is pivotal to speak about the most major platforms which have gained extend popularity among teachers and learners who acknowledged the benefits of these educational platforms for the

participants of learning process (teachers and students). Due to the vast majority of the platforms offering online learning, the list above will mainly discuss language ones:

Coursera and *edX*, for instance, offer extensive catalogs of language courses from renowned universities worldwide. Teachers can recommend specific courses in linguistics, language acquisition, or cultural studies relevant to their curriculum. Students can audit these courses for free or opt for verified certificates, providing them with structured learning experiences and recognized credentials. This flexibility allows learners to delve deeper into language theory, practice, and cultural nuances beyond traditional classroom boundaries.

Khan Academy, known for its comprehensive educational resources, provides an array of tools beneficial for language learners. Teachers can direct students to grammar tutorials, vocabulary exercises, and proficiency tests tailored to different proficiency levels. The platform's adaptive learning features personalize each student's practice sessions, ensuring targeted skill development and mastery. This personalized approach supports independent study and allows students to progress at their own pace, reinforcing foundational language skills effectively.

Udemy, with its focus on practical skills and professional development, offers language courses covering grammar, conversation practice, and specialized topics. Language teachers can curate a list of relevant courses or modules that align with their curriculum objectives. Students can purchase these courses during promotional periods or with group discounts, making it a cost-effective option for acquiring specific language competencies outside of regular class hours.

MIT OpenCourseWare is a valuable resource for supplementing language education with materials from Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT). It provides free access to lecture notes, exams, and videos across disciplines, including linguistics and cultural studies. Language teachers can recommend specific lectures or reading materials to deepen students' understanding of language structure, usage,

and cultural contexts. This resource-rich platform encourages self-directed learning and independent exploration, fostering a deeper appreciation for language as a dynamic aspect of global communication.

Duolingo revolutionizes language learning through its gamified approach, making daily practice fun and engaging. Teachers can recommend Duolingo for supplementary practice outside of class hours. Students set daily practice goals and engage in skill-building exercises across reading, writing, listening, and speaking. The platform's adaptive learning algorithm adjusts difficulty levels based on performance, ensuring personalized learning experiences that cater to individual strengths and areas needing improvement. Progress tracking and achievement badges further motivate students, fostering a sense of accomplishment and sustained commitment to language proficiency.

LinkedIn Learning offers a bridge between language acquisition and professional communication skills. Teachers can guide students to courses focusing on business language usage, cross-cultural communication, or effective communication in the target language. These courses, taught by industry experts, provide practical insights and strategies applicable to real-world contexts. By developing these skills alongside linguistic proficiency, students enhance their employability and readiness for global communication in diverse professional settings.

TED-Ed enriches language education through its engaging videos and accompanying resources. Teachers can utilize TED-Ed videos on language-related topics as supplementary materials or discussion starters in flipped classroom environments. The platform offers quizzes, discussion questions, and additional resources that deepen students' understanding of language concepts, cultural insights, and global perspectives. Incorporating TED-Ed into language lessons encourages critical thinking, fosters curiosity, and promotes meaningful discussions among students, enhancing overall engagement and comprehension.

YouTube, with its vast repository of educational content, serves as a versatile tool for language educators. Teachers can curate playlists of grammar tutorials, pronunciation guides, language learning tips, and cultural insights relevant to the target language. Visual and auditory learning opportunities on YouTube cater to different learning preferences and styles, reinforcing language skills through diverse multimedia content. Students benefit from accessible resources that supplement classroom instruction, providing additional context and practical application of language learning concepts.

By integrating these online platforms strategically into their teaching practices, language educators empower students to take ownership of their language learning journey. These platforms offer diverse resources, adaptive learning features, and opportunities for personalized skill development, catering to individual learning styles and needs. Embracing digital tools not only enhances language acquisition but also prepares students for lifelong learning and engagement in a globalized world where effective communication across languages and cultures is increasingly vital.

Based on the research made the following recommendations can be suggested:

Teacher Training: Invest in professional development programs focused on the principles and practices of fostering learner autonomy in online environments. Equip educators with skills to design and implement learner-centered instructional strategies effectively.

Curriculum Design: Develop and implement curricula that incorporate autonomous learning activities, such as project-based learning, self-assessment, and reflective practices. Ensure these curricula are aligned with digital tools that facilitate independent learning.

Student Support Systems: Establish robust support systems that include access to academic advisors, peer mentoring programs, and technical support. These systems can help learners navigate challenges and stay motivated in their online language learning journeys.

Resource Availability: Ensure the availability of high-quality digital resources and learning materials. Provide access to e-books, online libraries, and multimedia content that support autonomous learning.

Feedback Mechanisms: Implement effective feedback mechanisms that allow learners to track their progress and receive constructive feedback. This includes automated feedback from digital platforms and personalized feedback from instructors.

Policy Implementation: Continue to refine and implement policies that support digital education and learner autonomy. Encourage collaboration between policymakers, educators, and technology providers to create an enabling environment for autonomous learning.

By fostering learner autonomy through strategic educational practices and supporting policies, language educators can not only enhance language proficiency but also equip learners with the skills and mindset needed for lifelong learning. As Uzbekistan continues to embrace digital transformation in education, the emphasis on autonomous learning will play a crucial role in preparing students to thrive in an interconnected and rapidly changing world.

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