

## FOSTERING LEARNER AUTONOMY IN THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE CLASSROOM

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**Abstract:** Learner autonomy is an essential component of modern English language teaching that emphasises students' active involvement and responsibility in their own learning process. As education shifts toward more learner-centred paradigms, fostering autonomy has become a key goal for language teachers aiming to cultivate lifelong learning habits and critical thinking skills. This article explores the definition and significance of learner autonomy, outlines its benefits, and offers practical strategies for promoting it in the English classroom. The challenges in encouraging autonomous learning are also addressed, along with suggestions for gradual implementation. The article concludes that promoting learner autonomy leads to more engaged, self-directed learners capable of managing their language development both inside and outside the classroom.

**Keywords:** learner autonomy, English language teaching, self-directed learning, student-centred learning, language learning strategies, motivation, independent learning

As English language teaching shifts towards more learner-centred approaches, one concept gaining importance is learner autonomy. Autonomous learners take responsibility for their own learning, make informed decisions, and use strategies to improve their skills outside the classroom. This article explores the importance of learner autonomy, its benefits, and practical strategies teachers can use to promote it in English language classrooms.

The concept of learner autonomy is rooted in constructivist theories of learning, which emphasise the active role of learners in constructing knowledge through experience and interaction. Influential figures like Jean Piaget and Lev Vygotsky highlighted the importance of cognitive development and social interaction in learning. In language education, learner autonomy was further shaped by humanistic approaches, especially the

works of Carl Rogers, who stressed the need for learner-centred education, respect for individual needs, and self-directed learning. These theoretical foundations support the view that students learn more effectively when they are actively involved in planning, monitoring, and evaluating their learning.

Learner autonomy must be adapted to suit different age groups, proficiency levels, and cultural contexts. In primary education, autonomy may begin with simple choices and structured reflection. For adult learners, greater independence can be encouraged through self-assessment and flexible learning paths. Teachers working in exam-oriented or teacher-centred systems may need to introduce autonomy gradually, aligning it with curriculum goals and institutional expectations. Regardless of context, fostering autonomy requires patience, encouragement, and continuous scaffolding.

Learner autonomy refers to a student's ability to take charge of their own learning. It includes setting personal learning goals, selecting appropriate strategies, monitoring progress, and evaluating outcomes. In an autonomous learning environment, the teacher acts as a guide or facilitator rather than the sole source of knowledge.

Learner autonomy is important because it promotes lifelong learning, increases motivation, develops critical thinking, and supports differentiated learning. Autonomous learners are better prepared to continue learning beyond the classroom and are more engaged when they feel in control of their progress.

To foster learner autonomy, teachers can use various strategies: encourage students to set short- and long-term language learning goals. For example, ask them to write down what they want to achieve by the end of the semester and how they plan to do it. Learning journals: have learners keep journals to reflect on what they have learned, what strategies worked, and what challenges they faced. This practice builds self-awareness and responsibility. Explicitly teach students how to use language learning strategies such as summarising, guessing meaning from context, using flashcards, or listening to English podcasts, let students choose reading materials, topics for presentations, or types of assignments. giving choice supports ownership of learning, introducing tools and apps that promote self-study, like Duolingo, Quizlet, or Grammarly. Teach them how to use YouTube videos, TED Talks, and online courses to supplement classwork, and encourage

peer feedback, group projects, and student-led discussions. Teaching others reinforces the learner's own understanding.

Challenges to promoting autonomy include a lack of confidence, cultural expectations, and limited access to resources. Some students may feel unprepared to take control. Gradual support and scaffolding can help. In some educational contexts, teacher-centred methods are deeply rooted. Introducing autonomy should be done sensitively and progressively. Not all learners have access to digital tools. Teachers should suggest low-tech or no-tech alternatives like library reading or writing exercises. However, with proper support and gradual implementation, learners can develop the skills and mindset to become more autonomous.

Fostering learner autonomy is not about letting students learn entirely on their own—it's about equipping them with the tools and strategies to take responsibility for their learning journey. English language teachers play a vital role in nurturing this autonomy, helping learners grow into motivated, independent users of English.

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