

Learner autonomy

You cannot teach a man
anything; you can only help
him find it within himself.

Galileo Galilei (1564-1642)

10 Things Students Want Educators to Know

by Justin Tarte @justintarte

1

Students want you to spend the time to get to know them.



2

Students want to have a voice in the learning process and want to share "their" way of doing things.



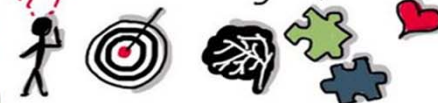
3

Students want to be treated with respect and dignity.



4

Students want to be "appropriately" challenged with meaningful and relevant learning experiences.



5

Students want educators to know that they too have bad & off days



@steviaaduckworth

10

All students want to know their existence matters and that they are important



9

Students want to know the work they are doing & the time they are committing to school will make a difference in the world.



8

Students want to be partners with you when it comes to the learning process.



7

Students want educators to be truthful & honest.



6

Students want their interests & passions to be infused into the learning that occurs in the classroom.



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Learner Autonomy

While Holec's (1981:3) definition of autonomy, i.e. the ability to take charge of one's own learning, is widely quoted, there is no single, agreed upon model of autonomy.

Autonomous Learner

Autonomy means the ability to take control of one's own learning, independently or in collaboration with others. An autonomous learner will take more responsibility for learning and is likely to be more effective than a learner who is reliant on the teacher. Learner training in the classroom encourages autonomy and is an important element of language teaching.

An autonomous learner will set their own goals, reflect on their progress, and seek opportunities to practise outside the classroom.

Autonomous learner


Ability to take charge of one's own learning

Main idea behind learner autonomy is that students should take responsibility for their own learning, rather than be dependent on the teacher (Holec 1981)

“The autonomous learner is one that constructs knowledge from direct experience, rather than one who responds to someone's instruction” (Benson 2001)

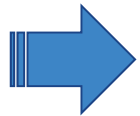
Autonomous learners



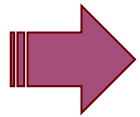
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- a) have insights into their learning styles and strategies
- b) take an active approach to the learning task at hand
- c) are willing to take risks
- d) are good guessers
- e) attend to form as well as to content, that is, place importance on accuracy as well as appropriacy
- f) develop the target language into a separate reference system and are willing to revise and reject hypotheses and rules that do not apply
- g) have a tolerant and outgoing approach to the target language

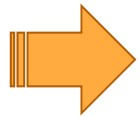
What we should do as teachers



Create awareness and ownership of the learning process



Provide strategies and lessons for gaining control and improving confidence



Tweak lessons as necessary

1

learners need to become aware of the ways they learn best, which involves their learning styles and strategies (Brazis, Kavaliauskienė, 2000). Naturally, it takes time for learners to find out what are the most effective techniques and activities for each person.

2

learners have to change their passive attitude to learning to a more active attitude, i.e. to become less dependent on the teacher and take charge of their own learning (Wilga M. Rivers, 1992). Teacher's role is to involve students in search for interesting materials, e.g. surfing the Internet, or finding pen-friends on the Internet, taking part in competitions, chat-clubs, encouraging to read English books, newspapers, magazines, etc.

3

Finally, learners have to be given a chance to gain experience in 'swapping places' with a teacher, which means changing the traditional role of a teacher, developing the art of negotiation, emphasizing the importance of self-assessment, etc. (Grudzinska, 2000). This involves tasks and activities designed and administered by the learners themselves. The diversity of tasks may cover grammar, games, written work, audio- and video-recordings, news items, translation -- you name it -- anything that interests learners will benefit them.

Task 1 - crossword puzzle

- Select a topic in your groups
- Write words in the box
- Write clues

Task 2 - grammar training

- Select a news item individually
- Write a small paragraph replacing the verbs with infinitives
- Ask your partner to guess
- Share your opinions when there is an alternative possibilities
- Award points

Task 3 - translation

- Translate into your mother tongue
- Exchange with your partners from your country
- Check the translations

What needs to take place

- 1) Teacher becomes less of an instructor and more of a facilitator
- 2) Students discouraged from relying on the teacher as the main source of knowledge
- 3) Students' capacity to learn for themselves is encouraged
- 4) Students encouraged to make decisions about what they learn
- 5) Students' awareness of their own learning styles is encouraged
- 6) Students encouraged to develop their own learning strategies

Technology to aid learner autonomy

- Internet
- Web 2.0 tools
- Apps / software
- CDs/DVDs etc.

Internet

Edmodo/classdojo

5 ways of using Edmodo

- Article sharing and discussion
- Listening task generation
- Time for a chat
- Let's cook
- Reporting a conversation

Taken from: <https://reflectiveteachingreflectivelearning.com/2014/02/20/5-ways-of-using-edmodo-with-language-learners-part-2/>

Developing vocabulary

- Dictionary apps/ URLs
 - <http://dictionary.cambridge.org>
 - WordWeb / MacMillan Sounds
 - <http://www.thesaurus.com>
 - <http://www.quizlet.com/>

Developing reading skills

- <http://dreamreader.net/>
- <http://www.manythings.org/>
- <https://breakingnewsenglish.com/>
- <https://www.storylineonline.net/>
- <https://english-e-reader.net/>

Questions

1. What does 'learner autonomy' mean to English language teachers?
2. To what extent, according to the teachers, does learner autonomy contribute to L2 learning?
3. How desirable and feasible do teachers feel it is to promote learner autonomy?
4. To what extent do teachers feel their learners are autonomous?
5. To what extent do teachers say they actually promote learner autonomy?
6. What challenges do teachers face in helping their learners become more autonomous?

Results

- Learning how to learn is key to developing learner autonomy.
- The ability to monitor one's learning is central to learner autonomy.
- To become autonomous, learners need to develop the ability to evaluate their own learning.
- Confident language learners are more likely to develop autonomy than those who lack confidence.
- Motivated language learners are more likely to develop learner autonomy than learners who are not motivated.

Q1

I believe the learner must be given a lot of freedom to develop his own style.

Learner autonomy to me means giving independence to students, to learners. Also giving chances to learners to choose the kinds of materials they want to use, the kinds of objectives they want to achieve.

... for students to be able to take responsibility for their own learning, to function independently as learners. Make their own decisions about their learning, their own choices.

Q1

... not depending exclusively on the teacher for your learning and your learning outcomes, but to take responsibility yourself and decide what it is that you need to learn.

... it's just trying to help students take charge of their own learning, it's as much as possible. Helping them being more independent and developing their own strategies.

... autonomy for me is an opportunity to work independently.

Q2

I think it's very important and I think it has a huge effect on motivation. And, the more autonomous the learners are, the more motivated they are. And then of course that affects their ability to learn the language, to learn the language well.

... rather than the teacher just imposing on the students what they thought, that actually involving the students meant that they were more committed to it, that they could identify with what they were doing because they'd decided it.

Q4

At least, they're aware of the ideas, whether it's 'Ok, I need to make my own schedule', or 'I need to plan', things like this. Or 'I need to be doing more outside of the classroom than just the required homework'. I see students that are at least aware of that, and at least they claim to be doing those things, even though maybe not all of them surely are.

Challenges and how to overcome

1. **lack of motivation:** By trying different things, learners gained more from their independent learning, which fed positively into their motivation. Learners' motivation also increased as a result of regular goal-setting (and satisfaction of reaching goals) and as a result of discussion.
2. **lack of tools/ideas:** the activity handouts gave learners a starting point, which they were encouraged to compare with what they already and use as the basis for further experimentation.
3. **lack of success:** this was addressed in two main ways. Firstly, the regular discussions meant that learners weren't isolated when they faced problems in learning to learn independently. Secondly, part of the discussions involved goal setting, which helped learners become more motivated when they met their goals.
4. **lack of confidence:** discussion and experience-sharing helped learners see that there are many different ways of learning rather than "right" and "wrong" ways. Starting with comparison between what learners already do and the ideas on the handout built in an opportunity for learners to validate their current methods, helping them feel less insecure about their learning habits. Having new ideas to try, in a supportive environment, helped learners have the confidence to extend their current learning approaches, increasing their effectiveness.
5. **lack of time:** learners were not castigated for spending time doing things other than language learning and were encouraged to spend any small amount of time that they could fit in amongst their other commitments. Thus learners were better able to focus on what they *could* do rather than what they *couldn't* do. Every little helps...

Resources

1. <https://esol.britishcouncil.org/content/teachers>
2. <https://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/article/vocabulary-autonomy>
3. <https://reflectiveteachingreflectivelearning.com/2014/02/20/5-ways-of-using-edmodo-with-language-learners-part-2/>
4. <https://reflectiveteachingreflectivelearning.com/2014/06/15/autonomous-listening-skill-development-2-dictations/>
5. <http://www.manythings.org/>