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Fostering Learner Autonomy in Foreign Language Learning: Justifications, Definitions, Misconceptions, and Interrelated Components for Its Realization
外国語学習者の自律性の促進：その根拠、定義、誤解、具現化のための相互関係的構成要素

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要旨
　第二言語教育の分野では、学習者の自律性の重要性と教室の内外での学習指導における学習者自身の役割に対する認識が高まった結果、教師中心の授業からより学習者中心の指導アプローチへと移行が加速している。しかし、学習者の自律性は多次元的で抽象的な概念であるため、多くの語学教師はその理解を難しく感じ、その結果として、外国語学習の授業への適用が困難であると思っている。そこで本稿では、これらの問題に取り組むことを目的に、 a）外国語学習において学生の自律性を促進すべき理由についての総合的議論を提供し、 b）学習者の自律性という概念の基礎になる理論的理解についての要約したレビューを示し、 c）教師が持つ学習者の自律性に関する一般的な誤解を検討し、 d）語学教育の文脈の中で育成すべき学習者の自律性についての相互関連した 7 つの構成要素を分析する。

キーワード: 学習者の自律性、自己調整、自己決定、外国語学習

Abstract
　As a result of a growing recognition of the importance of learner autonomy and the role of individual learners in directing their own learning both inside and outside the classroom, the field of second language teaching has seen an accelerated shift from a teacher-centered classroom to more learner-centered approaches to instruction. However, because learner autonomy is a multidimensional and abstract concept, many language teachers find it difficult to understand and, therefore, apply to their foreign language classrooms. This paper seeks to address these problems by a) providing a comprehensive discussion of reasons for promoting learner autonomy in foreign language learning; b) presenting a condensed review of the main theoretical understandings that underlie the concept of learner autonomy; c) examining common misconceptions that teachers have about learner autonomy; and d) scrutinizing seven interrelated components of learner autonomy that should be fostered within the language teaching context.

Keywords: learner autonomy, self-regulation, self-determination, foreign language learning

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Justifications for Promoting Learner Autonomy in Foreign Language Learning

Arguments can be made for promoting learner autonomy in foreign language learning based on philosophical, practical, psychological, and pedagogical reasoning.

The philosophical reasoning for promoting learner autonomy is the argument that it is a basic human right to be free, and therefore learners should be entitled to participate in decision making regarding what and how they learn. Enabling such freedom implies that the teacher adopt a more 'learner-centered' approach, whereby they advise and support autonomous learners to become actively involved in planning, implementing, monitoring, and evaluating their own learning.

The practical reasoning for promoting learner autonomy is the acknowledgement of the growing trend amongst learners to engage in self-study that is more independent of teachers and traditional classroom settings, prompted by advances in information technology. This includes increased levels of distance learning, computer assisted language learning (CALL), home schooling, and external (e.g. online) study.

The psychological reasoning for promoting learner autonomy is the argument that being able to take responsibility for one's own learning implies the presence of such attributes as intrinsic motivation, metacognitive skills, awareness of the subject in question, and awareness of learning as a process; all of which are considered aspects related to efficient learning.

The pedagogical reasoning for promoting learner autonomy is firstly the argument that autonomous learners are more efficient learners because they are self-reliant, motivated and capable of learning without a teacher. Secondly, possessing an ability to control one's own learning implies a capacity for life-long learning, a necessity in today's world of globalization and exchange of vast amounts of information, and for keeping up with the continuous change of occupational life and engaging in constant self-development. Thirdly, successful learner autonomy implies the ability to critically evaluate and reflect on information, enabling greater active and critical participation within society. Fourthly, successful learner autonomy insinuates the ability to apply social strategies to make use of other people as interlocutors, and as sources of input and help; social strategies applicable to collaboration and socialization within the workplace, classroom, or to the wider community.

Theoretical Understandings of Learner Autonomy

Since the beginning of the 21st century, interest in learner autonomy has grown considerably. Holec's (1981) often quoted definition of learner autonomy as "the ability to take charge of one's own learning" (p. 3) still remains central to the theory and practice of learner autonomy today,

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indicating a large degree of consensus among researchers in the field that the idea of autonomy involves learners taking more control over their learning. However, since the 1980s, definitions of learner autonomy have varied.

While Holec's (1981) definition explains what autonomous learners are able to do, it does not explain how they are able to do it. To counter this, Little (1991; 1994) emphasized the psychological attributes of autonomous learners and prioritized 'interdependence' over 'independence' in learning. This expanded notion of autonomy gave rise to research within a variety of fields, which has attempted to define the different elements of autonomy in learning such as motivation (e.g. Ushioda, 1996; Dörnyei, 2001), self–learning strategies (e.g. Wenden, 1991; Cohen, 1998; Macaro, 2001; Oxford, 2003), self-regulation (e.g. Schunk & Zimmerman, 1998; Zimmerman, Boekarts, Pintrich, & Zeidner, 2000) and individual differences (e.g. Dörnyei & Skehan 2003; Ehrman, Leaver, & Oxford, 2003; Ellis, 2004).

Furthermore, conceptualizations of learner autonomy from technical, psychological, and political perspectives (Benson, 1997), and also from a sociocultural perspective (Oxford, 2003), have provided us with different versions of the idea of autonomy; each emphasizing different aspects about the nature of autonomy in learning. For example, a technical perspective emphasizes the importance of physical settings of learning, both within and outside of formal educational contexts, highlighting skills or strategies for unsupervised learning. A psychological perspective, on the other hand, places emphasis on the mental attributes that enable autonomy. These include motivation, decision-making in the autonomous learning context, age and sex-related perceptions of competence, and self-esteem. A political (or critical) perspective focuses on issues of power and control, emphasizing ways in which the learning context can be made more empowering for the learner. Additionally, a sociocultural perspective emphasizes the roles of interaction and social participation in the development of learner autonomy.

However, Palfreyman (2003a, p. 4) notes that in real educational settings such perspectives should not be viewed simply as 'black and white alternatives', recognizing the gap that may exist between theoretical discussions of learner autonomy, teachers' understandings of the concept, and the practical operationalization of learner autonomy in the classroom.

Common Misconceptions about Learner Autonomy

Despite a general movement toward greater learner-centeredness in education and a growing interest in learner autonomy, five potential misconceptions outlined by Little (1991), regarding what learner autonomy entails, still persist among teachers today:

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Misconception 1: *Learner autonomy is essentially self-instruction and therefore can be achieved without an instructor.*

This misconception arises from a common misunderstanding that autonomy is synonymous with self-instruction. However, self-instruction (i.e. learning without direct control of a teacher) is distinguished from the concept of learner autonomy in that there is greater interdependence between teacher and learners in learner autonomy (Little, 1995). Furthermore, Esch (1997) cautions us to consider the danger in associating learner autonomy with learning in isolation, noting that while new technologies and self-access centers have brought a greater sense of freedom to language learning in the past few decades, they have also led to a greater sense of isolation for the learner.

Misconception 2: *Intervention by the teacher is detrimental to learner autonomy. Therefore, teachers need to relinquish total responsibility and control to the learner.*

Researchers in the field of learner autonomy advocate a more 'learner-centered' approach to teaching, which emphasizes the learner as the focus of the learning process (Benson, 1997; Dam, 2008; Killen, 2013; Little, 1991; Nunan, 1997; Voller, 1997). However, this 'learner centered' approach does not mean that teachers must relinquish total control and responsibility to the learner. Instead, they must now function in the role of counselor, advisor or facilitator, and support the autonomous learners to become actively involved in planning, implementing, monitoring and evaluating their learning.

Misconception 3: *Learner autonomy is a new teaching method that can be applied by teachers.*

It is important to note that autonomy is a process, not a product. Therefore, it is broadly accepted by researchers in the field that learner autonomy cannot be directly taught, but that it is developed through raising learners' conscious awareness of the learning process – i.e. conscious reflection and decision-making (Little, 1991; Benson, 2001; Sinclair, 2000). In addition, because there are various aspects of 'taking control over one's learning', learner autonomy may take various forms. Therefore, no single approach can be implied in fostering autonomy. Furthermore, the fostering of learner autonomy cannot be programmed in a series of lesson plans. Instead, it is a life-long process (Little, 1991).

Esch (1997) alerts us to the danger of reducing autonomous learning to a set of techniques which, although may lead to the display of autonomous behavior, do not support the more radical aspects of learner autonomy and the question of teacher control versus learner control in particular.

Misconception 4: *Learner autonomy is a single, easily described behavior.*

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The behavior of autonomous learners can take numerous different forms, depending on such aspects as what they perceive their immediate learning needs to be, their age, and how far they have advanced with their learning (Benson, 2001; Littlewood, 1997; Macaro, 1997; Nunan, 1997; Scharle & Szabó, 2000).

A common mistake is equating self-regulation of learning with autonomous learner behavior. While self-regulation entails control over the motivational, emotional, cognitive, and behavioral aspects of learning, autonomous learners are also capable of taking responsibility for determining the content of what they learn, the social-contextual environment where they learn, as well as the techniques and strategies they employ to learn (Benson, 2001; Oxford, 2003).

Misconception 5: *Learner autonomy is a steady state achievable by only certain learners.*

It is unrealistic to assume that learners enter their learning with the necessary skills to plan, monitor, and evaluate the content and objectives of their learning. If one accepts the absurdity of this notion, one must also accept that learner autonomy is an ideal, requiring a progression from 'lower' to 'higher' levels of autonomy (Nunan, 1997; Little, 1999a), and that individual learners will differ in their learning habits, interests, needs, and motivation, and develop varying degrees of independence throughout their lives (Tumposky, 1982).

The degree of autonomy demonstrated by an individual relies on their prior learning experience, and attitude and knowledge of learning (Dickinson, 1987). Learners who judge their capability to accomplish tasks to be low have been shown to demonstrate lower levels of autonomy than those learners who believe they have a high capability to carry out the same tasks (Pajares and Valiante, 2002; Seifert, 2004; Zimmerman, 2000).

Many of the above misconceptions arise from conceptual and terminological confusion about the term 'learner autonomy'. This is unsurprising considering that the term 'autonomy' in foreign language teaching has been used interchangeably with other terms such as 'self-instruction' (i.e. learning without a teacher), 'individualized learning' (i.e. instruction designed to meet the specific needs of the individual learner), 'self-access learning' (i.e. learning that occurs in a self-access centre containing different types of educational resources), 'self-directed learning' (i.e. learners determine their own needs and act accordingly), and 'distance learning' (i.e. learning remotely without being in regular face-to-face contact with a teacher in the classroom).

However, none of these above terms should be considered as synonymous with 'learner autonomy'. For example, isolation should not be regarded as a requisite for autonomous learning, since successful learner autonomy takes place within a sociocultural framework involving interdependence, and cannot be accomplished without a supportive environment or

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context. Furthermore, the total absence of a teacher in self-instruction contradicts the term 'learner autonomy', since this capacity cannot effectively be realised in isolation, but only through social interactions in which teachers and learners collaborate to achieve autonomy. In addition, learner autonomy cannot be restricted to learning in specially designed places such as self-access centers or online environments, but can take place either in a classroom setting with the support of a teacher, or in an independent setting with no external support. Moreover, 'individualized learning' is not synonymous with 'learner autonomy' since the former is viewed as a teaching method, which, although taking into account individual differences and preferences, produces an environment where the learner is still dependent on the teacher.

Fostering Learner Autonomy for Successful Language Learning

Based on Ikonen's (2013) compilation of themes deemed important among theories that foster learner autonomy, Pichugova, Stepura, and Pravosudov (2016) proposed a model that covers seven interrelated components of learner autonomy to be fostered within the language teaching context.

This model is useful since it clearly illustrates the interrelatedness of the seven major factors that promote the development of learner autonomy, and how these factors ultimately affect the degree of learner autonomy in language learning ranging from less successful to more successful. In addition, this model represents the shift of focus from the teacher to the learner, whereby both teachers and learners have to undertake new roles and responsibilities. Furthermore, this model displays these interrelated components in a non-linear manner, whereby the boundaries between them are not sharply defined, but in which the learner progresses to new levels of independence by engaging in learning experiences with both the teacher and peers over time in a spiral-like manner.

Each of the seven interrelated components in this model will be discussed in detail below.

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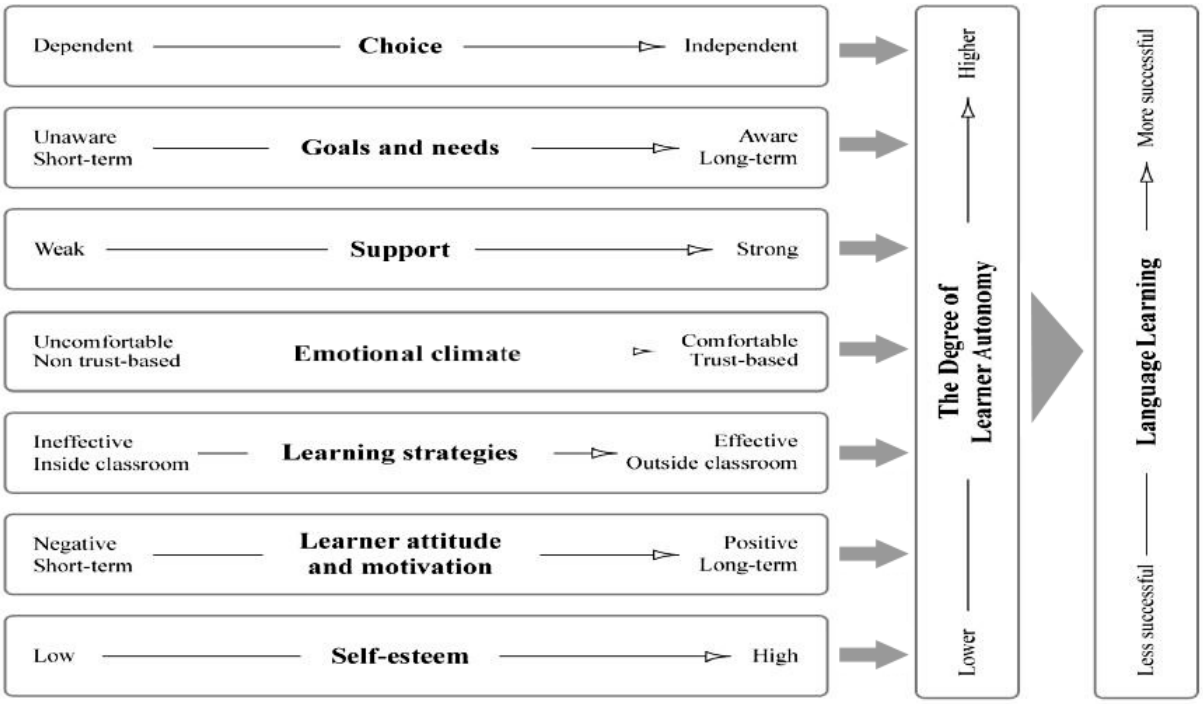

Figure 1. A model for developing learner autonomy in the foreign language teaching context (Pichugova et al., 2016).

1. Choice:

Since there is common agreement that learner autonomy can be defined as 'the ability to take charge of one's own learning', it follows that language learners be provided the opportunity to participate in decision making regarding their learning.

Stages of development in this aspect are achieved by gradually shifting the decision making focus from the teacher onto the learners. Involving language learners in making choices can be carried out on various levels, ranging from making short-term or long-term decisions regarding learning goals, choice of content, motivational issues, and in regard to strategy implementation to reach these set goals (Ikonen, 2013; Usuki, 2007).

Littlewood (1996) describes 3 domains of language development in which choices can be autonomously made: in the communicative domain, in the second language learning (L2) domain, and in the personal domain. Within the communicative domain, learners can engage in choices regarding language use and appropriate strategies for communicating meanings in different situations and specific tasks. In the L2 learning domain, choices can be made regarding independent use of appropriate learning strategies. And within the personal domain, learners can make choices about their learning in a wider context, such as creating personal learning contexts.

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2. Goals and Needs:

Cotterall (2000) states that any course seeking to foster language learner autonomy must devote time to raising learners' awareness of ways of identifying goals, specifying objectives, identifying resources and strategies needed to achieve goals, and measuring progress. Decisions regarding the elements of language, texts, tasks, and strategies to be focused on during the course are then made in relation to the stated goals of the learners.

Ikonen (2013) asserts that an important component of fostering language learner autonomy is for teachers to negotiate with students the various mechanisms that underlie their learning. This includes raising learners' awareness of their own strengths and weaknesses, raising awareness of their preferred learning styles and language learning needs, and raising awareness of what motivates them to study that language. Increased awareness of these mechanisms ultimately helps them make better choices about their learning and the goals they set for themselves.

3. Support:

Cornwall (1988) emphasizes the importance of the teacher and course structure in providing guidance and support during the controlled process of gradually introducing learners to the new roles that come with greater learner autonomy. Crabbe (1993) refers to support provided by multiple resources and contexts that can be utilized when needed; including not only inanimate resources such as dictionaries or computer assisted learning programs, but also 'living' resources such as teachers or peers. Ikonen (2013) claims that support for learner autonomy can thus be seen to consist of two aspects: something that is offered to students in their learning and development of learner autonomy, and something they are guided to make use of independently.

Nunan (1997) proposes five levels of learner autonomy requiring support by the teacher, representing a gradual pedagogical intervention through which learner autonomy can be best developed. At the first level, the teacher simply makes learners aware of the goals, content and materials of teaching. At the second level, the teacher begins to allow learners involvement in goal-setting procedures. At the third level, the teacher allows learners to directly intervene in these goal-setting procedures. At the fourth level, learners are allowed to create their own goals and objectives. And at the fifth and final level learners are encouraged to apply classroom content creatively to the world beyond.

4. Emotional Climate:

Barfield et al. (2001, p.3) claim that "the ability to behave autonomously for students is dependent upon their teacher creating a classroom culture where autonomy is accepted".

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However, language teachers lacking any autonomy-oriented training may experience difficulties in creating such a classroom culture, and there is evidence that teachers who themselves are not autonomous language learners may have a negative influence on the development of autonomy in their students (Sert, 2006; Viera, 2007; Smith and Erdoğan, 2007; and Burkert and Schwienhorst, 2008).

Research seeking to understand the role of teacher-student relationships in student motivation, has shown that motivational styles can be conceptualized along a continuum, with one extreme being a climate that supports autonomy and the other, a more controlling kind of climate. These studies have shown that the quality of students' motivation depends to some extent on their relationships with their teacher and the climate the teacher establishes in the classroom (Black & Deci, 2000; Deci, Schwartz, Sheinman, & Ryan, 1981; Reeve, Bolt, & Cai, 1999; Reeve & Jang, 2006).

Within an autonomy supportive climate, teachers seek to create classroom conditions favorable to meeting students' needs in a way that promotes internalization processes and enhances intrinsic motivation. It also involves the teacher paying more attention to what students say, and the provision of sufficient time for students to solve problems independently. Teachers promoting such a climate are also thought to provide more informative feedback to students regarding their personal progress and mastery of learning tasks (Leroy, Bressoux, Sarrazin, & Trouilloud, 2007).

In comparison to students with controlling teachers, students with autonomy supportive teachers have been shown to exhibit higher intrinsic motivation (Deci, Nezlek, & Sheinman, 1981), greater achievement (Boggiano, Flink, Shields, Seelback, & Barrett, 1993), more academic success (Flink, Boggiano, Main, Barrett, & Katz, 1992), a greater feeling of competence (Deci, Schwartz et al., 1981), and more perceived autonomy (Reeve & Jang, 2006).

5. Learning Strategies:

The concept of learning strategies is directly related to the practice of 'strategy training' and contributes to the practices of 'learner training', or 'learner development' (Wenden 2002). A strong relationship has been shown between learner autonomy and the use of learning strategies because they both promote the self-directed nature of learning (Macaro, 2001; Oxford, 1990; Wenden, 1985, 1991).

Cotterall (2000) advocates the need to incorporate into language courses discussion and practice with strategies known to facilitate improved task performance. This might involve teachers in the modelling of language learning strategies, or having peers suggest strategies from their own personal collections; thereby extending the choice of strategic behaviors

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available to learners, and expanding their conceptual understanding of the contribution which strategies can make to their learning.

While strategy training is considered an important component in developing learner autonomy, it is argued that learner autonomy involves more than the use of learning strategies, and therefore learner training should not be limited simply to training in strategy use (Little, 1999b; Palfreyman, 2003b). To better define the concept of learner autonomy, learner training should be expanded to incorporate constructs such as 'self-regulation' - the degree to which individuals are active participants in their own learning (Dörnyei, 2005); 'learner beliefs' - the beliefs and perceptions that underlie personal attitudes about learning (Wenden, 2001; Usuki 2003); 'metacognitive knowledge' - the system of related ideas regarding language and learning (Wenden, 1999); and 'learner self-management' - the ability to deploy procedures and to access knowledge and beliefs in order to accomplish learning goals (Butler, 1997; Rubin, 2001). Advocates of this expanded view of learner training endorse guiding learners to become more aware of their learning style preferences, strategy choices on specific tasks, and 'motivational temperature' (Cohen, 2002).

The notion of self-regulation is drawn from the field of educational psychology, and highlights the importance of the learners' innate self-regulatory capacity that supports their efforts to search for and then apply personalized strategic learning mechanisms. Self-regulation is described as learners' efforts to direct their own learning by setting goals, planning how to achieve them, monitoring the learning task, using learning strategies to solve problems, and evaluating their own performance. In this regard, self-regulation is considered a broader construct than language learning strategies, because it involves a number of processes and understandings that include self-management, learning strategies, motivation, metacognition, and autonomy (Chamot, 2014).

6. Learner Attitude and Motivation:

A shift to more cognitive-situated approaches to L2 motivation research in the 1990s has resulted in attention being drawn to the importance of intrinsic motivation (i.e. enjoyment of learning a second language for its own sake without any external pressure) and how it can be fostered by engaging learners in tasks and goals designed to promote feelings of success and competence in learners (Ushioda, 1996; Williams and Burden, 1997). In addition, L2 motivation research has drawn attention to the importance of personalizing learning content and making it meaningful and relevant to the learners (Chambers, 1999).

Students' intrinsic motivation and a sense of self-determination has been found to be influenced by the teacher adopting an autonomy-supportive, rather than a controlling,

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communicative style, and by the provision of informational feedback on students' learning (Noels, Clément, & Pelletier, 1999; Ushioda, 1996, 2003). This has led to advocacy for adopting a democratic, rather than authoritarian, leadership style in the classroom, involving students in some of the decision-making processes that involve their learning (Ushioda, 2003), and fostering trust, good interpersonal relations, and a cohesive learner group (Dörnyei, 2007).

Furthermore, investigation of alternative motivation paradigms, such as 'self-determination theory', has introduced elements into L2 motivation theory that are relevant to autonomy. Self-determination theory (SDT) focuses on the following three factors that appear to enhance intrinsic motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2000):

1. Competence: Feeling capable of learning English well.
2. Relationships/Relatedness: Feeling welcome from the teachers and English speaking community.
3. Autonomy: Feeling that English is chosen by the student rather than imposed.

According to self-determination theory, there are two general types of motivation, one based on intrinsic interest in the activity itself and the other based on rewards extrinsic to the activity. However, these two types of motivation are not viewed as being categorically different, but rather they lie along a continuum of self-determination where, through the process of self-regulation, extrinsic motivational orientations toward learning the L2 are progressively transformed into intrinsic (self-determined) values and motivations (Noels, Pelletier, Clément & Vallerand, 2000).

While researchers have found that language programs that emphasize autonomy are more likely to foster student motivation and potential success (Brookes & Grundy, 1998; Dickenson, 1995; Littlewood, 1996), the teacher's influence in regards to intrinsic motivation is considered as great as the language program itself. This is because the teacher exerts control not only over the materials and activities they select for students, but also control over the type of social-contexts they create for students to cultivate their competence, confidence, and autonomy. In this regard, teachers are seen to play a central role in activating and sustaining students' intrinsic motivation, which is associated with positive L2 learning outcomes.

7. Self-Confidence:

Although Pichugova et al.'s (2016) model in Fig. 1 describes this component as 'self-esteem', this author believes it more accurate to describe this component as 'self-confidence' since the concept of self-confidence refers to belief in one's personal worth and likelihood of succeeding, and is closely related to motivation. Self-confidence is a combination of both self-esteem (i.e.

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your general attitude toward yourself) and general self-efficacy (i.e. beliefs about your ability to perform specific tasks such as studying, driving, etc.).

Students at all levels of language development are thought to be affected by anxiety in language learning. Often viewed as a negative influence regarding motivation, anxiety is considered a powerful factor in language learning (Oxford, 1999), and has been found to be associated with deficits in listening comprehension, decreased vocabulary learning, diminished word production, low scores on standardized tests, low grades in language courses, or a combination of these factors (Gardner, Tremblay & Masgoret, 1997).

Intrinsic motivation has been shown to be the most influential determinant of learners' self-confidence and motivation to learn an L2 (Pae, 2008). Therefore, encouraging learners to be involved in L2 learning for intrinsic reasons, for example the experience of stimulation and accomplishment or satisfaction of desire for knowledge, is believed to not only promote greater motivational intensity and positive L2-related attitudes, but also an enhanced perception of L2 competence and less perceived anxiety.

Self-determination theory suggests that self-confidence is increased as a bi-product of cultivating an intrinsically motivated classroom through the creation of a social context that satisfies inherent human needs for competence, autonomy, and relatedness (Ryan & Deci, 2000; Noels et al., 2000).

In practical terms, feelings of competence are cultivated by the classroom teacher devising learning activities that are intrinsically motivating, and that ensure students regularly experience success and gain a sense of achievement. Feelings of competence are also cultivated by the teacher counterbalancing learning experiences that may result in frustration with less difficult activities, as well as including confidence building tasks within the classroom, and highlighting what learners can do in the L2 rather than what they cannot do. Furthermore, feelings of competence are cultivated by encouraging in learners the view that mistakes are a natural part of the learning process, and that there is more to communication than just accuracy (Dörnyei, 1994).

A sense of relatedness in the classroom (i.e. a learner's feelings of belonging and connectedness with peers and the teacher) is cultivated by the classroom teacher ensuring that language teaching and learning is accompanied with interactive activities that strengthen the relatedness both between the teacher and learner, and also among peers (Pae, 2008). Also, by the teacher sensing and reading students' states of being and adjusting their instruction accordingly (Wolff & Ijzendoorn, 1997), and by adopting a gentle discipline strategy that involves explaining why a particular way of thinking or behaving is right or wrong (Kochanska,

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Aksan, & Nichols, 2003). It is also achieved by the teacher making an effort to provide a rationale why language learning, although not necessarily an interesting and enjoyable activity, may be personally important to the learners (Noels et al., 2000).

A sense of autonomy is cultivated by the classroom teacher enabling learners a more active role in identifying their own needs, setting their own course goals, planning their learning, selecting resources and learning strategies, determining the types of language practice they will engage in, monitoring their own progress , and assessing and revising their own learning (Reinders, 2010).

It is important to consider the boundaries between the above seven interrelated components underlying learner autonomy as not being sharply defined. For example, a pre-requisite for enabling learners to establish their own goals and needs is developing in them greater awareness of their own strategic learning mechanisms (e.g. learner beliefs, learner style preferences, self-regulation, and metacognition). Furthermore, development of these interrelated components should be viewed as occurring in a non-linear manner, in which the learner progresses to new levels of independence by first moving through additional phases of interdependence with their teacher or peers in a manner similar to the curving movement of a spiral (Little, 2000).

Taken as a whole, these seven interrelated components center around three key components in general: ability, willingness, and support. To be successful in autonomous learning, all of these key components need to be present. Furthermore, these key components are based upon key underlying assumptions and conditions that must also be met.

In learner autonomy, ability refers to learners' capacity to choose materials, to set goals, to apply learning strategies to learning both inside and outside the classroom, to communicate effectively with others, and to evaluate their work and that of others. However, ability also assumes learners' possession of knowledge of alternatives from which choices can be made, and of the necessary skills and strategies for carrying out whatever choices are deemed most appropriate.

Willingness refers to the extent to which learners accept responsibility for their own learning and take initiatives in their learning. However, willingness also assumes that learners have both the motivation and self-confidence to take responsibility for their own learning and the choices they make.

Support refers to levels of guidance and support provided to learners by teachers, multiple resources and contexts, and by the extent to which learners are provided a harmonious classroom culture where autonomy is accepted. In this regard, teachers play important roles.

However, providing supportive situations that foster learner autonomy assumes that teachers have undergone autonomy-oriented training and have a good understanding of the various processes underlying autonomy support both inside and outside the classroom.

Conclusion

Despite a growing interest in promoting learner autonomy in foreign language education in recent years, there remains much uncertainty among educators regarding the benefits and nature of autonomy in language learning, and what practices best foster it within language learners. Much of this uncertainty is caused by the vagueness and multidimensionality of the concept of learner autonomy itself, and by the fact that autonomy has to be understood as a progressive process that consists of several phases, stages, or levels.

This paper has attempted to provide foreign language educators with a greater understanding of learner autonomy by first describing the importance of learner autonomy in foreign language learning, then attempting a comprehensible explanation of the theoretical understandings and components that underlie the concept of learner autonomy. Following this, this paper draws the reader's attention to five common misconceptions about learner autonomy. Finally, it outlines seven interrelated components of learner autonomy and ways they can be fostered within the realm of language teaching.

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