



## Main Characteristics of an Autonomous Language Learner

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**Abstract:** Learner autonomy is cited in this article as a potent tool for language learning, because it fosters critical thinking, problem-solving, and decision-making abilities throughout the learning process. Responsibility of one's education becomes only student's priority as they are supposed to find the educational resources, strategies, motivate and give feedback to themselves. Three most important basic phases of autonomous language acquisition are thoroughly covered in this work. On these stages, traits like self-motivation, self-assessment, media literacy, facilitation skills and a strong sense of responsibility are highlighted as characteristic features of an autonomous learner. The advantages of learning a language as an autonomous learner will be provided in the paper.

**Keywords:** Language acquisition/learning, learner autonomy, autonomous learner, responsibility, media literacy, language proficiency, self-motivation.

There are millions of people who are eager to learn a foreign language in the world. Unfortunately, not all of them keep their mind on studying and succeed in a language acquisition. It takes a lot of work and effective time to master the target language (various levels of difficulty vary based on the language). Moreover, language learning is a long process: consistent practice and countless times of repetition can be tiresome. These hardships can be the reason why most people give up on language learning quite easily. But there is a certain type of language learning strategy by choosing which students are more likely to achieve high language proficiency and it is called 'learner autonomy'. So, first, what is 'learner autonomy' and what are the advantages of learning a foreign language as an autonomous learner?

'Learner autonomy' this term has been widely used in the contexts of education, homeschooling and language acquisition since 1981 (Frenchman Henri Holec made a specific reference to it during his speech about shifting the focus from teaching to learning) [1] and has been considered as one of the best educational methods, because it enables students to be independent by making them take charge of their education: they will be responsible for identifying their learning needs, objectives, instructional resources, picking out right strategy and assessing the results which will develop decisions making, problems solving skills and later help at work [2]. Unlike many other methods, this one gives the learners a perfect chance to develop their critical thinking skills, which can be a key for career success. Even though it can be challenging to study without teacher's guidance and instructions, the outcomes will far superior to those anticipated.

Here are three main stages which includes various behavioral, mental and physical requirements to become autonomous in language learning.

**1. Taking responsibility.** The first step that needs to be taken, whether you are a traditional or independent learner, is to determine your goal. Then, you may begin the study trip, which is filled with intriguing but challenging tasks. Hence, the most integral part is the next-

taking responsibility, which is rather problematic for autonomous students since they are the ones who take charge of their studies. Indeed, being autonomous means that the learner is responsible for everything regarding the learning process, including keeping the studies distraction-free. Learning should be more focused and purposeful, and thus more effective both immediately and in the longer term.<sup>1</sup> However, in this modern era where Gen-Z technology offers 24/7 internet access, people are more and more distracted both in case of study and work, however, if a person is ambitious towards his goals like learning a foreign language, no matter what happens, he keeps going blocking out all distractions: “The capacity to learn is a gift; The ability to learn is a skill; The willingness to learn is a choice.” (Brian Hebert) Moreover, in order to improve one’s learning outcomes learner autonomy requires self-evaluation. Not being reliant on teacher’s assessment autonomous learners can keep track of their studies by taking tests, for example, and after having identified knowledge gaps the learners try to gain the knowledge of those ‘missing parts’. The results of learner autonomy will be better than those in typical classes where pupils are much more passive since it entails a lot of responsibility.

**2. Media literacy and developing facilitation skills** The 21<sup>st</sup> century is known as The Digital era, where the New Generation has every facility and technology to enhance their life-quality. Through the utility of Internet platforms like social media, they can always reach out for necessary data [3]. Web websites such as Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn provide a place where users can dialogue, exchange ideas, and find solutions to problems.<sup>2</sup> Although the youth are aware of today’s technologies and mass media, they still are not competent to distinguish fabricated and inaccurate data from the original ones because they lack media literacy. Again, for students learning a foreign language autonomously, it can be far more challenging, as they do not get assistance from their tutors or instructors. As a consequence, they have no other choice than critically engaging with media messages and products and increasing the ability to access, understand, analyze and use them.

Before selecting a study material, they should check it according to the relevance to the subject, author, publisher and the date of publishing (if new information is needed). Going to libraries is also advisable as published books are claimed as the most reliable source of information. Moreover, autonomous learners should be good facilitators as long as they are not provided with educational resources beforehand. Therefore, they take charge of finding study materials such as textbooks, dictionaries, audio books, podcasts, and other stuff. With the advancement of new technologies, instructional materials are easily available for students, but not everything on the Internet can be considered as a reliable learning material. Which means self-taught learners should not only make resources available but also check if they are trustworthy and good-quality.

**3. Self-motivation.** Motivation is something that drives autonomous learners for satisfactory results in language learning but self -motivation might be difficult to obtain because it is an internal driving which should come directly from the learner. There are a few requirements of building self-motivation. Firstly, set up a study plan with realistic goals, and then commit to your studies [4]. Importantly, during this process do not forget to set deadlines and document the progress, which can be a stimulus towards fulfilling ambitions: reaching each milestone encourages to go further, whereas every failure makes the language learner point out his weaknesses. Secondly, start from small. Getting started is often the hardest part on low-motivation days, so it is easier when the task is small: listening to a six-minute BBC English podcast or trying two tongue twisters. These seemingly small actions can prime one’s mind for the task at hand, so the follow-through—a longer study session on a language learning—can happen more naturally with less mental resistance [5]. Thirdly, just be realistic accepting all the possible obstacles, like health problems, no internet access or even receiving a phone call. In addition, learning a foreign language challenges both your brain and time, which is why it is impossible to jump from basic knowledge to C1. For those without any prior knowledge of the language, CEFR estimates it will take around 70 hours of regular study time to reach the A1 level [6] Lastly, reward yourself to the limit for every single milestone, so that you will enjoy the learning process.

<sup>1</sup> Little, D. (1991). *Learner autonomy 1: Definitions, issues and problems*. Dublin: Authentik.

<sup>2</sup> Sitti Zainab Mukhtar: “Using Social Media in the English Teaching and Learning Process

Considering every single point stated above, you may say: “Learning a foreign language autonomously is the hardest path for this goal, while there are many other favorable and practical techniques.” Or: “Why to prevent yourself from the help of others?” Yet the paths full of obstacles and hardships always lead to the greatest success. The more you struggle now, the easier it will be to solve much bigger life problems in the future. All the characteristics of an autonomous learner help you not only to learn a new language effectively, but also to be independent, which can be a big plus for your future career. As once Walt Whitman said: “Not I, nor anyone else, can travel that road for you. You must travel it by yourself.”

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