THE INTERNET AND LEARNER'S AUTONOMY IN SECOND LANGUAGE LEARNING

Natalia IVANUȚA,

English teacher -*Professional School No.6*,

Chișinău, Republic of Moldova

Rezumat. *Unul dintre obiectivele principale ale predării limbii engleze studenților școlilor profesionale este dezvoltarea competenței de comunicare în limba engleză. Elevii ar trebui să posede abilități bune de ascultare și vorbire pentru a se putea integra în comunitatea globală și a dezvolta o carieră de succes. S-a constatat faptul că activitățile individuale desfășurate în afara lecțiilor de limbă engleză sunt nespus de utile în dezvoltarea competențelor de comunicare și în același timp contribuie la formarea autonomiei elevului. Cercetarea relevă avantajele dezvoltării autonomiei elevilor și a factorilor precum motivația și tehnologii digitale văzute că elemente formative in formarea competenței de comunicare în limba engleză la elevi. Considerăm că activitățile sistematice, individuale realizate acasă și în același timp monitorizate de profesor vor contribui la sporirea abilităților de ascultare, citire și scriere ale elevilor și, în același timp, vor dezvolta autonomia acestora.*

Abstract. *One of the main goals of teaching English to students of professional schools is to develop English communicative competence. Students should possess good listening and speaking skills to be able to integrate in the global community and build up better careers. Extra-classroom activities help teachers to develop better English communicative competence and more autonomous learners. The research reveals the advantages of developing learners` autonomy and factors like motivation and internet technologies by which the competence development is increased. Systematic extra classroom activities monitored by the teacher will contribute to the increase of the students listening, reading, and writing skills and at the same time will develop students' autonomy.*

Cuvinte cheie: *educație globală, limbă străină, competență de comunicare, autonomia elevului.*

Keywords: *global education, foreign language, communicative competence, student autonomy*

Introduction

Mastering English is very important to first-year professional school students. English communication skills will help students to broaden their career opportunities. The national curriculum has a pragmatic orientation; it states that the primary goal of Vocational school English discipline is to develop students' communicative competence. This will ensure a successful integration in the global community and brighter career. Having good listening and speaking skills the students should be able to use English in a well-rounded way, this fact will facilitate better future professional studies and career (Inform from National Curriculum).

Students from the first year have different levels of English knowledge. That is why most time the teachers should adjust and build learning sources on more levels. Most of the tasks are tailored to meet the actual needs of students and, most of the time, students work in groups where collaboration facilitates learning. However, the short time for classroom activities impedes the achievement of the

goals. Considering all the aspects that can help to emphasize the efficiency of the development of good English language skills was found that developing students' autonomy could be a real booster of the students' communicative competence. Systematic extra classroom activities monitored by the teacher will contribute to the increase of the students listening, reading, and writing skills and at the same time develop students' autonomy. Furthermore, there was seen a direct relation between learners` autonomy and motivation. It is known that motivation is key that drives learning. The research is based on an earlier study by Spratt et al. [2002], who consider autonomy and motivation as two elements that interact in a cyclical way in the language learning process.

Theoretical Framework

The role of motivation in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) has been researched with a strong emphasis on its relationship to language learning achievement (Bernaus & Gardner, 2009; Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2013; Patrick Proctor et al., 2014). However, little attention has been paid to the link between motivation and learning autonomy (Spratt et al., 2002; Z. Ma & R. Ma, 2012; M. C. Cheng & T. P. Cheng, 2013), even though for most learners, autonomy interlaces their motivation and language learning success.

In that respect, Gardner (1985) argues that motivation implies not only a desire to learn a language but also a measure of an individual's attitude toward working and striving to achieve a learning objective. Thus, without self-discipline and autonomous effort, motivation itself would not be sufficient to produce desired language learning results in the long term (Pickard, 1995).

For English as a second language (ESL) students, autonomous language learning can implicate engaging in everyday activities such as asking for directions, reading street signs, interacting with friends, and talking with acquaintances. In contrast, EFL learners must usually make a greater effort and work more independently to acquire new vocabulary and expressions. Consequently, EFL students see autonomy as a crucial element to learning the target language (Najeeb, 2013). In this paper, learners' autonomy is revealed through individual work (worksheets), comprehension tasks and reflection by which students report on the outside-class activities they carry out to learn English. Even though research on autonomy is not novel, new studies must emerge to provide insights into the evolution of autonomous language learning strategies and their relationship to the technological resources available to learners.

College Students' Autonomy and Language Learning Process

Autonomy, from Holec's perspective (1981), is the ability of language learners to manage their own learning using appropriate strategies to obtain a desired language proficiency goal. Some of the strategies selected by autonomous language learners may include:

a) finding a suitable learning methodology;

b) setting learning goals;

c) deciding learning content and pace;

d) supervising the learning process;

e) assessing learning achievements.

Objectively suggests that the concept of autonomy does not only encompass the students` "ability" to take charge of their own education, but it also implicates having the "capacity" to take responsibility for the whole learning process. Driven by this concept, universities and language learning centers have integrated the use of technology into the learning curriculum so as to provide students with the means of promoting and enhancing their autonomy [14].

Learning autonomy can be acquired and fostered through formal education, as indicated by Sanprasert (2010). Language teachers can promote their students` autonomy through appropriate training that encourages students to work independently. For instance, Firth (1997) points out that equipping students with self-monitoring and self-correcting abilities allow them to realize their capacity to teach themselves without much reliance on teacher instruction.

Holec (1981) maintains that autonomy is not inborn but must be acquired either by "natural means" or through "formal learning". Teachers are responsible for the level of autonomy students have. The level of autonomy students has, mainly depends on the strategies teachers use while teaching or designing their teaching learning process [3]. In short, autonomy has to be developed by teachers, it allows learners to materialize their learning aspirations through hard work and persistent dedication, and plays an essential role in the process of learning an L2.

Links between Motivation for Learning and Autonomy

Dickinson (1995) said that autonomous language learners become more highly motivated when they achieve their expected learning outcomes [8]. In contrast, learners who constantly experience failure in learning a language may end up having a negative attitude towards the target language, which in turn could result in a lack of interest to engage in the process autonomous activities.

Autonomy is viewed by some scholars (i.e. Pintrich, 1999; Vandergrift, 2005) as the result of motivation. They argue that only those who have an interest or motivation (extrinsic or intrinsic) to learn an L2 can have the necessary discipline to engage in hard work and devotion to learning the target language. However, other scholars, such as Dörnyei, and Csizér (1998) suggest that motivation comes after autonomy. In fact, a history of debate emerged within the literature as to whether motivation is a cause or an effect of autonomy (Spratt et al., 2002). More recently, in the words of Dörnyei and Ushioda (2013), the consensus is that motivation, autonomy, and learning achievement are interrelated forming a cyclical process (see Figure 1).
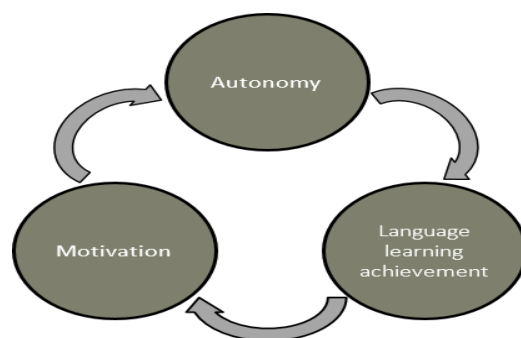
Figure 1. The cyclical process of motivation, autonomy, and achievement in EFL learning

It is well known from scholars` points of view that a learner`s autonomy is the ability to take charge of learning, it is a transformative educational term that is based on the idea of doing something. When the learner is deeply involved in learning actions, the subject comes in touch with his learning objectives, thinks about them, establishes goals, thinks about the content, tasks, efficiency, and shapes or choice of strategies. All these taken, transform the learner into an active one. An autonomous language learner could control his learning situation by setting his learning objectives, constructing the content to be learned and its progress, choosing the method and techniques to be applied, monitoring the learning process, and determining the evaluation [8].

An active learner has a high motivation. Students become more involved in their learning experiences when they become aware of their learning activities. Many researchers agree that these students display intrinsic motivation. The sphere of intrinsic motivation includes: attitude and awareness interest, relevance and curiosity, value, self-concept, self-efficacy, goal setting and goal reaching that can be developed through personalized activities done in extra-classroom time [3].

Types of autonomy in learning. Autonomous Language Learning Supported by the Internet

This concept, developed as opposed to classical education in all aspects, was recuperated, absorbed, and diluted especially by the technological currents of the last century. In fact, learner autonomy has been a matter of centuries whose roots can be found in the meiotic of Socrates. Furthermore, Montaigne and Rousseau emphasize the importance of individual education and the discovery of fundamental notions of the child by himself. On the other hand, as opposed to the behaviorism of B.F. Skinner, Piaget opens the era of cognitivism with his theory of constructivism that can be formulated as "teaching how to learn".

From a perspective of language teaching, Mangenot (1994) distinguishes four kinds of autonomy:

- Physical autonomy: possibility for the student to learn by following other models rather than the classical "teacher-learner" interactional pattern;
- Social autonomy: learning in interaction within a group;
- Linguistic autonomy: learning the language in order to make something else with it;
- Cognitive autonomy: learning how to learn by-self.

Physical autonomy refers to which online sources contribute to language skills development and are beneficial for autonomous learning:

- allow students to study parallel to their rhythms, independent from the others, all being active;

- without any doubt, because of re-dramatization of error (constructive feedback) and modification of the relationship of teacher-student interaction, it is often observed a great motivation;

- different styles of learning are respected;

- in the case of free access without the presence of the teacher, the students do not feel the pressure of time and may offer themselves supplementary hours.

Let us see how the Internet can contribute to autonomous language learning and what the qualities of such contribution are. There are more aids that can help the learners in their journey to become more autonomous learner and enforce their English communicative competence.
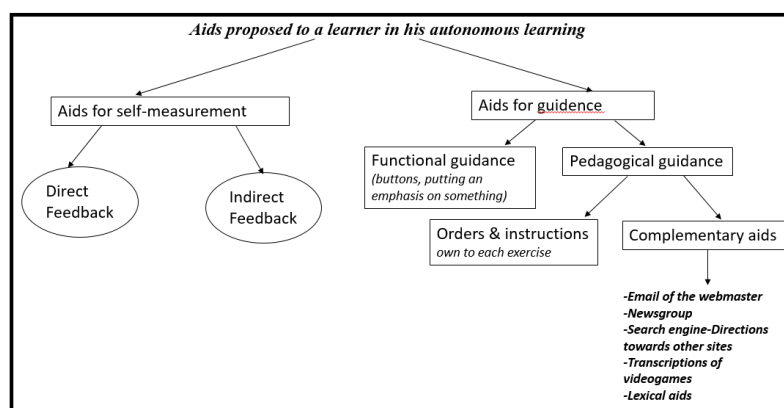

Figure 2. A typology of suggested aids

Generally, in the learning sites, two types of aids can be proposed to a learner in his autonomous learning (see Table 1). These are:

- Aids for self-measurement (individual assessment or auto-evaluation): these are the direct or indirect feedback. Here we have to indicate that because of type of activities (as we have seen nearly all of them are "one answer question", that is the meaning that they authorize only one correct response or impose a choice between the responses given) these kinds of sites generally propose direct feedback;

- Aids for guidance: Bastien, Leulier, and Scapin (1998) clarify that "guidance" means "the unity of means implemented in order to advise, orientate, inform and lead the learner at the time (instant) of his interactions with the computer, included lexical aids" [11].

Cord-Maunoury (2000, pp. 249-250) categorizes this concept under two headings:

- *Functional guidance:* this is the unity of components dependent on the functionality of the site such as buttons, putting an emphasis on something, colors, etc, which help to orientate the learner in his course and mark out himself in the site.

• *Pedagogical guidance:* this is the unity of components provided by designers (learners and computer scientists), which guide the learner in his study and lead his reflections over the contents.

This type of guidance is generally provided by:

-orders and instructions own to each exercise: these instructions are generally short and clear which points out what the learner has to do such as "choose the best answer(s), fill in the blanks, etc. Interactivity is executed by the navigation and the execution of the instruction and orders such as "notice, choose or find the best response".

- and complementary aids: these are the background components that are able to help the learner in his autonomous study. At this time, these components present themselves outside of the context and conform to particularities of the Internet under the forms of e-mail of the webmaster, newsgroup, search engine, direction towards other sites, etc. Additionally, it is possible to speak of the transcription of videograms and lexical aids. The latter item is generally seen as directing learners through related links to electronic dictionaries on such websites.

In designing the students' tasks was considered the given types of aids and guidance and taken into account their advantages that helped us to build better individualized and formative activities.

Conclusion

This work reached the proposed aims. The term of learners' autonomy was examined and what activities conduct to the development of the learners' autonomy. It was shown the sphere of learner1s autonomy involves activities that transform our learner in a more responsible one. Being deep involved in designing their learning experiences students will understand better their needs and become more aware of the need for improvement. The results confirmed Spratt's (1998) position related to 'autonomy and motivation factors in the sense that they create an increased interaction in the EFL learning process. Finally, they will become more motivated and able to spend more time working and increasing their English communicative competence.

I this research, internet technologies were seen as very useful in designing students' extra-classroom activities for the increase of their English communicative competence.

Different types of aids like self-measurement (individual assessment or auto-evaluation) and for guidance were used to improve final outcomes.

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