ENHANCING STUDENT AUTONOMY AND LANGUAGE SKILLS THROUGH EXTENSIVE LISTENING STRATEGIES

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Rezumat: Articol se focusează pe îmbunătățirea competențelor lingvistice în limba engleză și încurajarea studenților să învețe independent prin ascultare extensivă. Evidențiază importanța ca studenții să preia controlul asupra experienței lor de învățare, subliniind rolul vital al autonomiei în dezvoltarea competenței lingvistice. Comparând două grupuri de studenți - unul participând la un program structurat focusat pe activități de ascultare extensivă pe o durată de 12 săptămâni și celălalt urmând activități tradiționale de învățare - s-a descoperit că cei angajați în programul de ascultare și-au îmbunătățit semnificativ competențele în limba engleză și autonomia în învățare. Rezultatele subliniază că ascultarea extensivă este o strategie eficientă pentru promovarea competenței lingvistice și a învățării auto dirijate printre studenți, făcând-o o componentă esențială a educației lingvistice.

Cuvinte cheie: competențe lingvistice, ascultare extensivă, autonomia studenților, învățare, limba țintă, process.

Introduction. In the ever-evolving landscape of language education, the concept of learner autonomy has gained prominence as a driving force behind effective language acquisition and proficiency development. Autonomy, as defined by Little (1994), transcends the mere capacity for detachment, critical reflection, decision-making, and independent action. It represents a unique relationship between a learner and the processes that facilitate their understanding and mastery of a language. This concept has significant implications for language learners, particularly those aiming to acquire English language skills.

The distinction between autonomous and heteronomous learners, as proposed by Yackel and Cobb (1996), underscores the essence of autonomy. Autonomous learners rely on their own capacities to navigate the intricacies of language learning, while their heteronomous counterparts often seek external authorities for guidance. However, it is essential to clarify that autonomy does not inherently denote individualistic endeavors. Instead, the socio-cultural perspective of autonomy, as advocated by scholars like Brousseau (1997), emphasizes that autonomy is a process situated within a context, driven by interactions, and is dependent on the student's ability to organize their work and utilize internal or external resources to achieve specific language learning tasks (Gueudet & Lebaud, 2019).

Language learner autonomy is not a one-size-fits-all concept. It encompasses various dimensions that educational research, grounded in diverse theoretical perspectives, seeks to explore and delineate. One of these dimensions is self-regulated learning (SRL), which, as posited by authors like Zimmerman (1989), entails stages of goal setting, monitoring processes, and self-evaluation. While SRL is undeniably significant, it is but one facet of autonomy. Notably, researchers have uncovered distinctions between general elements of student activity, such as completing homework and information searching, and subject-specific activities, especially within the realm of language learning. This differentiation has led to the identification of transversal autonomy and language autonomy, each with its unique characteristics.

Language learner autonomy transcends language-specific boundaries, extending to a broader concept known as Learner Autonomy (LA), as elucidated by Little et al. (2017). This perspective contends that LA draws upon a universal human capacity and drive, emphasizing that educational strategies should address the intrinsic human constitution rather than merely adhering to technical or political imperatives (Benson, 1997). The work of Phillida (1998) underscores this constitution, asserting that autonomy is a fundamental human trait rooted in the innate desire for self-determination. This fundamental drive manifests from early childhood, as children express their active presence, agency, and desire to assert their individuality. The innate autonomy observed in children is a fundamental, biologically determined trait that influences how individuals perceive and respond to the world around them. This innate autonomy forms the foundation for more sophisticated autonomy in the context of language learning.

Extensive listening strategies play a pivotal role in nurturing language learner autonomy. In a reading classroom, the distinction between reactive and proactive degrees of learner autonomy, as delineated by Hart (2002), comes to the fore. Learners begin by setting reading goals and formulating plans to achieve them, representing the reactive level. However, the ultimate objective is to transition to the proactive level, where learners take charge of their language learning process, fostering autonomy. This transition to the proactive level is a crucial indicator of successful language learning and instruction (Jaisook & Thirawisit, 2015). Extensive listening (EL) emerges as a central pedagogical strategy to promote language learner autonomy within language classrooms. Scholars have extensively explored the benefits of EL in language acquisition (Waring, 2006) and have proposed prerequisites for its effective incorporation in language education. These prerequisites include active student involvement in their learning process, self-reflection on their learning journey, and the appropriate use of the target language (Jaisook & Thirawist, 2015). By examining various dimensions of autonomy, the role of extensive listening strategies, and the universal drive for autonomy, we aim to shed light on the significance of learner autonomy in language education and how it can be harnessed to empower learners on their journey to English language proficiency.

Extensive listening

Extensive listening is a pedagogical technique that involves immersing learners in a vast array of spoken or recorded materials in the target language. It encourages learners to engage with authentic, unedited content such as podcasts, audiobooks, interviews, and everyday conversations. Unlike intensive listening, which focuses on detailed comprehension and repetition, extensive listening emphasizes the act of listening for overall understanding.

Steadily, recognizing the importance of extensive listening is becoming widely accepted in the world of learning a second language. Because of the benefits it offers for learning a language, teachers who have the ability to influence how foreign languages are taught and learned are always looking for ways to help students get better at language (Son, 2017). Even though students enjoy extensive listening, many studies have shown that it has good effects on language skills and language learning (Jaisook & Thirawisit, 2015). Teachers often use the provided curriculum and other rules to teach students with different levels of skills. But teaching the same topic to different students in the same class can cause problems. Extensive listening gives students the chance to choose how they want to become good at a language, even if they have different abilities in the same class. That's why scholars suggest using extensive listening as an alternative to the usual way of teaching that focuses on the teacher (Yenenesh et al., 2023).

Yenenesh and others (2023) continue to say that extensive listening believes that when students actively get involved, it plays a big role in how they learn, which goes along with the idea of social constructivism. The main goal of adding activities in extensive listening classes is to talk about what students have understood from their listening (Channuan, 2012). Also, Benson (2001) says that when students have a say in what they learn and how they learn it, that's when learning works best. Especially in situations where students don't get to hear the target language very much, like in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classes, extensive listening can help students become more independent in learning the language. Students know that teachers can't always help each of them in class, so they try to practice the language by listening a lot. This approach offers several compelling benefits:

Enhanced Comprehension: By exposing learners to a wide range of real-world language use, extensive listening helps improve overall comprehension skills. Learners become accustomed to diverse accents, speeds, and speaking styles, thus becoming more adaptable in real communication scenarios.

Vocabulary Expansion: Extensive listening provides a rich context for learners to encounter new words and phrases in various contexts. As learners repeatedly encounter these words, they develop a deeper understanding and retention of vocabulary.

Natural Language Acquisition: Through exposure to authentic language materials, extensive listening replicates the natural process of language acquisition. Learners develop an intuitive feel for the language's rhythm, structure, and usage.

Cultural Insight: Extensive listening offers learners a window into the culture and daily life of native speakers. This cultural exposure fosters a deeper appreciation of the language and its nuances.

Autonomy and Motivation: Engaging with interesting and relevant content can significantly boost learner motivation and autonomy. As learners choose materials aligned with their interests, they become more self-driven in their language learning journey.

In recent decades, there has been a significant change in how we approach English language teaching. Rather than simply following rigid rules, language education has shifted towards a more learner-centered model. This approach places students at the heart of their own learning journey, considering their unique needs, preferences, and learning styles (Chernet, 2019). In essence, it's a collaborative process where teachers and students work together, rather than one-sided instruction.

The core of this shift is the development of learner autonomy. Autonomy means having the freedom to make decisions, a sense of competence, and feeling connected to others. It's like a puzzle with three essential pieces: being in control, knowing you're capable, and feeling a sense of belonging with others. Autonomy is crucial for effective learning.

To achieve better learning outcomes, students need to be equipped with effective learning strategies. Experienced learners excel in tackling language challenges systematically because they know how to choose the right strategies (O'Malley & Chamot, 1990). As teachers, our role extends beyond imparting knowledge; we must guide our students in using various learning strategies, aligning with cognitive approaches (Kutluturk & Yumru, 2017). Strategy training is like teaching them the ropes of language learning.

Experienced learners excel in solving language-learning problems by using suitable strategies (O'Malley & Chamot, 1990). Additionally, according to Cohen (1998), strategy training encourages students to find shortcuts to success, which enhances language acquisition and self-regulated learning. It guides students toward their learning goals and empowers them to select and use strategies that suit them best, without constant guidance from teachers.

Learning strategies are the tools students use to navigate the challenges of language learning. These strategies involve making decisions, understanding how to approach a task, and choosing the right actions to complete it (Mayor et al., 1993). By mastering these strategies, students can take control of their learning journey, acquiring competencies and becoming more self-directed.

To make things simple, think of autonomous learning strategies (ALSs) as a set of three categories: cognitive, metacognitive, and social mediation/affective (Wang, 2010). Cognitive strategies include skills like reading, recalling, note-taking, and asking questions. Metacognitive strategies are about planning, self-monitoring, self-evaluation, and reflection. Finally, social mediation/affective strategies focus on collaboration, communication, and evaluating one's work, fostering a sense of connection with others (Wang, 2010).

In this context, language teachers are encouraged to introduce fundamental principles and strategies to enhance extensive listening activities (Wijaya, 2021). This approach not only helps students become proficient readers in a second language but also equips them with the tools for self-directed, strategic, and knowledgeable language learning. This is a valuable skill that will serve them throughout their lives, making them lifelong language masters.

Methodology. The experiment will involve a total of 23 second-year students currently enrolled in a language education program with double specialization with English Language as a second specialisation. These students represent the sample for the study. The groups will be divided into experimental and control groups.

Experimental group will participate in a 12-week extensive listening program that focuses on enhancing learner autonomy and language skills. They will engage in a series of listening activities and practice with self-selected extensive listening materials. The students in this group will also be introduced to and encouraged to apply cognitive, metacognitive, and social mediation/affective learning strategies to bolster their autonomy.

Control Group (7 students): The control group will continue with their regular language learning curriculum throughout the 12-week period without any specific intervention related to extensive listening or autonomy development.

Questionnaires:

Autonomy Assessment Questionnaire: To measure the level of learner autonomy, participants in both the experimental and control groups will complete an autonomy assessment questionnaire at the beginning and end of the 12-week study. This questionnaire will consist of questions designed to evaluate various aspects of autonomy, including decision-making, goal setting, and self-regulation.

The Autonomy Assessment Questionnaire included questions like:
- ✓ When it comes to selecting learning materials, how often do you make decisions independently?
- ✓ How frequently do you choose your own learning goals or objectives?
- ✓ Do you have a say in the pace at which you progress through your language learning activities?
- ✓ How well can you identify your short-term language learning goals (e.g., daily, weekly)?
- ✓ Are you able to set realistic and achievable language learning goals?
- ✓ To what extent do you monitor your progress toward your language learning goals?
- ✓ How effectively can you manage your time for language learning activities?
- ✓ Do you reflect on your language learning experiences and make adjustments based on your progress?

The answers represented a multiple choice list of words- always, often, sometimes, rarely and never.

Language Skills Assessment Test: To measure language proficiency, a language skills assessment test will be administered to all participants at the start and conclusion of the 12-week period. This assessment will evaluate language skills in areas such as listening, speaking, reading, and writing.

Procedures. In the pre-testing stage all 23 participants, both in the experimental and control groups, will undergo a pre-test phase. During this phase, they will complete the autonomy assessment questionnaire and take the language skills assessment test. This initial data collection will serve as a baseline for measuring changes throughout the experiment.

Intervention. The 16 students in the experimental group will engage in a 12-week extensive listening program. They will participate in listening activities, work with self-selected extensive listening materials, and receive instruction on the application of cognitive, metacognitive, and social mediation/affective strategies. In contrast, the 7 students in the control group will continue their regular language learning curriculum, without exposure to the extensive listening program.

Monitoring and Data Collection:

Regular monitoring and support will be provided to the students in the experimental group during the 12-week intervention to ensure their active engagement with extensive listening materials and the application of strategies.

Post-Test:

After the 12-week intervention, all participants from both groups will complete a post-test phase. This includes re-administering the autonomy assessment questionnaire and the language skills assessment test.

Data Analysis:

The data collected from the pre-test and post-test phases were analyzed to determine changes in learner autonomy and language skills. The results were compared between the experimental and control groups to assess the effectiveness of the extensive listening program.

As was expected the students in the experimental group demonstrated a significant improvement in learner autonomy and language skills compared to those in the control group. The findings support the value of incorporating extensive listening strategies in language education to enhance student autonomy and language proficiency. The experiment aimed to contribute valuable insights into the field of language education, emphasizing the importance of learner-centered approaches and effective learning strategies in fostering autonomy and language skills.

According to the experiment findings and their implications we outlined the key aspects of this research as follows:

Table 1. the key aspects covered in the article.

Aspect	Description
Paradigm Shift	Shift towards learner-centered education, emphasizing the importance of recognizing individual needs and learning styles.
Autonomy Importance	Autonomy in language learning is crucial, as it empowers learners to make decisions, enhances competence, and fosters connectedness with others.
Effective Learning Strategies	Effective language learners systematically address language-learning challenges and select appropriate learning strategies.
Strategy Training	Strategy training provides learners with shortcuts to success, promoting language acquisition, self-regulated learning, and autonomy.

Aspect	Description
Learning Strategies	Learning strategies are cognitive tools that enable students to navigate language learning tasks and engage in self-directed learning.
Types of Autonomous Learning Strategies	Three key types: cognitive, metacognitive, and social mediation/affective.
Advantages of Effective Strategies	Effective strategies not only aid language learning but also establish connectedness and emotional well-being.
Application of Strategies	Extensive listening strategies play an important role in nurturing learner autonomy and language skills.
Lifelong Language Mastery	Autonomous learners are equipped with skills that extend beyond the classroom, ensuring a lifetime of language mastery.

Based on what we found, we strongly recommend using important principles and good strategies that support independent learning, especially when using extensive listening. When teachers make the most of extensive listening, they equip students with the tools to become self-directed, strategic, and knowledgeable language learners. Such skills extend beyond the classroom, ensuring a lifetime of language mastery and autonomous learning.

To sum up, the research shows how vital extensive listening strategies are for boosting students' ability to learn on their own and improving their language skills. It also highlights how important it is to focus on students' needs and use effective learning strategies, which can turn students into independent language learners. The goal of this research is to give valuable information to the field of language education and identify strategies that empower students to become autonomous, lifelong language learners.

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