



The Development of Autonomy through Meta-cognitive Strategies Training at Private Universities

Jiayi Liu, Gengxue Li

Qingdao City University, Qingdao 266106, Shandong, China

Abstract: Learner autonomy is widely recognized as vital for effective English learning, and metacognitive strategies have been proven to be closely correlated with the development of learner autonomy. This study focuses on non-English major students at private universities, aiming to explore practical approaches to cultivating learner autonomy via systematic metacognitive strategy training. The research mainly adopts classroom intervention experiments, investigating students' application of metacognitive strategies in three core aspects: English learning planning, process-oriented self-monitoring, and extracurricular self-directed learning. The findings reveal that targeted metacognitive strategy training significantly enhances students' awareness of autonomous learning, improves their ability to arrange learning tasks and evaluate learning outcomes independently, and effectively boosts their overall English learning initiative and academic performance. It concludes that integrating metacognitive strategy training into regular English teaching is an effective and feasible way to promote learner autonomy among students in private universities.

Keywords: learner autonomy; metacognitive strategies; private universities; English learning.

1. Introduction

In structured educational systems, taking charge of one's own learning acts as the essential foundation of a learner's ability to study autonomously; the development of learner autonomy is dependent on the exercise of that responsibility in a never-ending effort to understand what one is learning, why one is learning, how one is learning, and to what degree one is succeeding; and student autonomy has the effect of removing the walls that so readily create between formal education and the outside world[1] (Cotterall and Crabbe,1999). Holec (1981) demonstrated a clear link between metacognitive and learner autonomy[2]. Self-directed learners are able to set objectives, pick learning strategies, define learning materials, and monitor and assess their progress. Apart from that, Wenden and Rubin (1987) also point out that metacognitive is one part of autonomy[3]. Therefore, learners are more likely to become autonomous learners if they are aware of their metacognitive processes and can employ suitable metacognitive strategies[4] (Tong, 2012).

Jiao (2005) gives four substantial reasons in support of learner autonomy for English learning. Firstly, learners' motivation can be boosted by autonomy learning, which leads to more efficient learning. Secondly, learners with more learning autonomy have more opportunities to communicate in English in a non-native situation. Thirdly, learners at all levels can benefit from learning autonomy since it caters to their specific needs. Lastly, it has a long-term impact. Autonomous learning can help people build their lifetime learning skills[5].

However, in teaching practice, autonomous learning has not been widely recognized by students in private universities. Students are overly dependent on teachers due to the limitations of traditional schooling and teaching approaches. Teachers also worry about the lack of independent learning ability of students and the delay of learning time. Therefore, it is difficult for both students and teachers to apply this method in social practice. Due to long-term lack of independent learning ability, students will invest a lot of time and energy after class, but their English learning effect is poor. Therefore, it is necessary to study the important factors affecting students' autonomous learning ability according to the actual situation at private universities and make targeted changes.

This paper will expound on learning autonomy and its development through metacognitive strategies at private universities. Through metacognitive strategy training, students will know how to make a studying plan, organize, monitor, and evaluate their studying process. Finally, students can have the ability to learn without teachers in the classroom and outside.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Autonomy in language learning

Learning autonomy is not new content in language learning, and it had been discussed and researched by a lot of

educators in the past period, such as Bound (1981) and Candy (1991), since the early 1970s[6] (Sinclair, McGrath and Lamb, 2000). About language learning, autonomy has been described in a variety of ways. The definition of autonomy is complex and multifaceted. Perhaps the most widely cited definition stems from Holec, who characterizes learner autonomy as the capacity to exercise control over one's own, including setting goals, defining material and progressions, and choosing methods and strategies. A more contemporary explanation is Bergen's theory, which holds that learner autonomy is defined by a readiness to take control of one's education in order to further one's objectives[5] (Sinclair et al., 2000). Accordingly, it is easy to see that the existing notion of autonomous learning emphasizes the importance of learners' inclination to assume more responsibility for their personal learning processes. As I have discovered, a negative attitude is one of the biggest barriers for students to develop their learning autonomy, so it is necessary to make establishing students' positive attitudes.

In addition, learner autonomy is a desirable goal that is rarely realized[6] (Sinclair et al., 2000). Because an individual's potential is always confined in some way by the norms, cultural practices, and political aspirations of the society in which they live. The concept that there are degrees of autonomy is implicit in this view of autonomy as an aspirational objective[6] (Sinclair et al., 2000). Autonomy isn't an absolute concept. There are different levels of autonomy, and it is determined by a variety of elements such as the learners' personalities, their goals for learning foreign languages, and the cultural context in which the learning takes place. Learners with a positive attitude toward autonomy in their personality and preferred learning method may become largely self-sufficient. This means that researching learner autonomy involves a comprehensive understanding of the cultural, social, and educational context in which it exists.

Furthermore, self-direction is an important part of autonomy preparation, but it must be combined with psychological and methodological preparation, such as encouraging positive attitudes toward taking on more responsibility and developing greater metacognitive awareness. The instructor, learning consultant, distance learning tutor, and self-access facilitator all play a vital supporting role in this[6] (Sinclair et al., 2000). Learning to be more self-directed is not an "all or nothing" concept; it is frequently a progressive process that develops as students get more comfortable with the concept of personal responsibility. Students who are self-directed eventually gain more confidence, involvement, and skill[7] (Oxford, 1990).

2.2 The relationship of metacognitive strategy and learning autonomy

Wenden (1991) asserts that learning strategies—of which metacognition is the key—are essential to fostering autonomous learning[7]. Metacognitive strategy is one of the aspects of autonomous learning, which can make learners pay attention to their learning progress and realize that they are learning subjects. So it is significant to know more about the effect of metacognitive strategy on learning autonomy.

Holec (1981) pointed out that formulating learning objectives, determining learning content, choosing learning approaches, as well as tracking and assessing progress toward these goals, are all essential tasks that autonomous learners are required to fulfill[2]. These coincide with the strategies of metacognitive self-management, self-monitoring and self-evaluation. Metacognitive strategies training is beneficial to improve learners' autonomous learning ability, which can be proved not only by the improvement of second language learners' performance but also can be demonstrated by learning motivation theory and affective filtering theory[8] (Krashen, 1985). Krashen regards motivation, anxiety, self-confidence and other emotional factors as adjustable filters, whose function is to allow or hinder language input freely. Therefore, for autonomous learners who lack guidance and encouragement from teachers, metacognitive strategy training can more effectively boost learners' learning confidence and motivation, and reduce their learning anxiety, because they can monitor their entire learning process, thereby reducing their emotional filter level and enabling language smoothly to enter the language acquisition mechanism in the brain to improve language level.

3. Application

3.1 Making learning plans

Planning is an extremely important part of a metacognitive strategy that can contribute to learning autonomy. Organizing, creating goals and objectives, thinking about the purpose, and preparing for a language assignment, assist learners in organizing and planning their language learning efficiently and effectively[9] (Oxford, 1990).

Taking reading class as an example, at the beginning of the class, teachers show the goals and requirements of the whole class, such as knowing the cultural background of the passage and searching more information of it, understanding the main idea through skimming, completing the exercises through scanning and reciting keywords and sentences proficiently, and guide students set their own goals according to their situation.

3.2 Self-monitoring

To improve students' self-monitoring ability in learning, it is necessary to boost learning motivation, improve learning practices, expand learning thinking, reflect and correct in time, cultivate students' independence and endurance, and make students want to learn, be able to learn, and enjoy learning.

To cultivate students' self-monitoring awareness, teachers should set lots of different parts in class. For example, in the writing class, teachers give students a topic and assign a task that students need to brainstorm and make a mind map that lists the information of the passage. In this part, students have ample time to think about and complete tasks by themselves. Teachers move around the classroom at the same time, observing students work on their tasks. When students finish the work, teachers ask them to discuss their answers in the study group and double-check each other's answers. In this situation, the student will engage in a lively debate over the contentious activity. Their minds are also quite active at the same time, and they can solve issues without the assistance of teachers. After discussing, teachers invite some students who had good outcomes by observing to speak out the thinking process and share the mind map in the class. During this process, other students can monitor and amend their answers. Numerous elements can influence the adoption of metacognitive strategies, therefore students' reactions are likely to vary. Therefore, self-monitoring becomes especially important when they study independently.

For example, during the implementation of specific learning tasks, monitor the learning process, such as whether students actively participate in classroom activities, whether students have sufficient background knowledge. At the same time, students should also monitor learning goals and check the learning goals at any time. The completion situation and the difficulties encountered in the specific implementation process which is also a manifestation of students' autonomous learning. In this way, students can improve their self-monitoring and management abilities and learn independently instead of relying on teachers.

3.3 Extracurricular studying

Learning autonomy is not only in the classroom, but it also runs through the lives of students. Extracurricular activities are considered part of a well-rounded education because they give a way for students to reinforce classroom lessons and apply academic skills in a real-world situation. Therefore, it is particularly important to cultivate students to actively and independently study after class. Teachers need to encourage students to be aware of the importance of selecting and collecting academic materials, as well as participating in worthwhile extracurricular activities. For instance, after class, teachers can assign numerous questions as homework to let students gather materials and study independently. This can not only improve students' ability to use learning strategies, but also improve learning autonomy.

3.4 Autonomy and its development through metacognitive strategies

Most of the students in private universities did not have systematic learning strategy training before, they just accepted the teacher's request passively, and then carried it out according to the request. However, most students may establish a step-up objective for their English test results at each level after receiving metacognitive strategy training, and they can create their study plans, including short-term and long-term plans, to reach the goals. Furthermore, through monitoring the learning process, they can complement and improve the plan and reflect and evaluate their learning outcomes in time. These characteristics are the embodiment of the autonomous learning of students. Due to individual differences, each student has a different degree of improvement in learning autonomy after the training of metacognitive strategies. As Nunan (1997) said, autonomy is a concept of degree[10]. Therefore, all of these changes support the former conclusion of Wenden (1991).

4. Conclusion

In this article, the primary approach to training for autonomous learning essentially amounts to metacognitive strategy training. To facilitate the development of students' autonomous learning capacity, the students' metacognitive level must be developed. When conducting metacognition training for students, some suggestions should be paid attention to. Firstly, when integrating metacognition into English teaching content, teachers should pay attention to combining the characteristics of the subject, and infiltrate the characteristics of the English subject and the structure of the textbook in classroom teaching. The knowledge of learning strategies and learning objectives guides students to not only pay attention to language learning but also to pay attention to the learning of metacognitive knowledge. Meanwhile, teachers should guide students to understand their learning characteristics and the current learning situation, help students formulate their learning plans and choose appropriate learning strategies, to improve their self-confidence. Secondly, in the process of integrating metacognition into English teaching content. Teachers need to emphasize directing students to pay attention not only to academic results but also to the learning journey, encouraging them to contemplate on experiences gained during the process, summarize learning

rules, reflect on their successful attempts, experience a sense of accomplishment, and develop self-confidence gradually.

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