

# Utilizing technology for enhancing independent learning and self assessment

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**Abstract:** The evolution of technology, marked by its continuous advancements, has not only been utilized for the creation of crucial teaching aids but has also become potent tools for self-education among EFL learners. The language acquisition process appears to be more efficient with the integration of innovative Information and Communication Technology (ICT) tools. This research seeks to offer a comprehensive understanding of how learners incorporate technology into their self-directed learning. Additionally, it aims to present recommendations for leveraging technology to enhance learner autonomy and self-assessment in language learning.

**Keywords:** independent learning, learner autonomy, self-assessment, technology

## I. LEARNER AUTONOMY

### 1.1 Definitions of learner autonomy and different perspectives perceived towards learner autonomy

According to Holec (1981) as cited in Dang (2012), learner autonomy is “the ability to take charge of one’s own learning”. This early but influential definition has been cited in most paper on learner autonomy. The term “ability” refers to metacognitive knowledge of learning; in order to have such ability, learners are supposed to develop their own learning strategies, “determine the objectives”, “defining the contents” (language awareness), deciding the context in which learning takes place (time, place and pace of learning), and evaluating the learning process. These are the characteristics of an autonomous learner claimed by Holec (1981). Among these definitions, the definition given by Holec (1981) is the most successful definition in covering the core feature of learner autonomy.

Unlike Holec (1981) who examined the features of an autonomous learner in terms of five components mentioned above, Benson (2001) as cited in Nguyen (2009) studied this in terms of areas of control. Benson introduced three broad areas of controls, these are, “control over learning management” (technical perspective), “control over cognitive processing” (psychological perspective) and “control over learning content” (political perspective). Oxford (2003) indicates that Benson does not take socio-cultural perspective into consideration and this is the fourth perspective towards learner autonomy that has

been investigated so far.

The four perspectives are technical perspective, psychological perspective, socio-cultural perspective and political-critical perspective (Oxford, 2003). The technical perspective emphasizes the importance of physical settings. The extreme version of technical perspective requires learners to learn alone without any assistance from teachers or tutors. Learner autonomy is defined as the capacity to take responsibility of their own learning, which does not mean studying alone. Learners’ mental and emotional characteristics are taken into account by psychological perspective (Oxford, 2003). The psychological perspective recognizes the relationship between motivation and learner autonomy and the use of learning strategies, but not the socio-cultural aspects of learning (Oxford, 2003). The socio-cultural perspective believes that social interaction plays an important role in learner autonomy. Through interaction with more knowledgeable ones, students can acquire new knowledge that is beyond their current level as Ellis (1997) suggested in support of Vygotsky’s point of view. As new knowledge is learned, students’ learning capacity is expanded.

### 1.2 Models of learner autonomy

There has been a substantial amount of studies that attempt to set out models for measuring learner autonomy. Most of the research has agreed on some principles of learner autonomy, namely determining goals and objectives, defining content, determining learning strategies and evaluating learning process.

Some of the studies have added other principles of learner autonomy.

I will start by discussing the models of learner autonomy developed by Nunan (1997).

Level	Learner Action	Content	Process
1	Awareness	Learners are made aware of the pedagogical goals and content of the materials they are using.	Learners identify strategy-implications of pedagogical tasks and identify their own preferred learning styles/strategies.
2	Involvement	Learners are involved in selecting their own goals from a range of alternatives on offer.	Learners make choices among a range of options
3	Intervention	Learners are involved in modifying and adapting the goals and contents of the learning program.	Learners modify/adapt tasks.
4	Creation	Learners create their own goals and objectives.	Learners create their own tasks.
5	Transcendence	Learners go beyond the classroom and make links between the content of classroom learning and the world.	Learners become teachers and researchers.

Table 1. Five-level model of learner autonomy (Nunan, 1997, p. 195)

## II. UTILIZING TECHNOLOGY FOR ENHANCING INDEPENDENT LEARNING

Learners have the ability to independently monitor and control their learning processes, especially when utilizing computers, which allows them to become less reliant on teachers. Jones (2001) emphasized the significant role teachers play in fostering learner autonomy in Computer-Assisted Language Learning (CALL). Kohonen (2001) asserted that making choices regarding what and how to learn, reflecting on their learning process, being aware of their progress, and identifying new needs are vital aspects of promoting learner autonomy. Therefore, fostering learner autonomy requires providing learners with opportunities to reflect on their actions and how they attain their personal learning objectives. This study will propose some methods of integrating technology

to enhance learner autonomy and self-assessment.

### 2.1 Using technology-supported activities in face-to-face classrooms

Christopher (2006) found that the interaction with technology allows students to exercise control, monitor their learning progress, and enhance their engagement in class. Activities supported by information and communication technology (ICT) also offer students opportunities for reflection, negotiation, and the implementation of language rules. In a case study reported by Blin (2004), approximately forty first-year students studying French as a foreign language engaged in collaborative construction of a French learning website over a twelve-week period. This collaborative effort involved various tasks such as information retrieval, generation of thematic materials, minute-taking during meetings, and negotiation of labor distribution. Through these activities, students collectively reflected on their language learning experiences, experimented with different linguistic structures, and developed skills for learning from others in the community.

### 2.2 Using technology-supported activities outside classroom

Dorota (2014) discovered that technology has the potential to enhance students' creativity and flexibility, particularly in tasks such as preparing presentations or designing websites. Additionally, it facilitates communication and collaboration with peers worldwide through tools like blogs, wikis, and the uploading of photos, videos, or podcasts. The availability of immediate feedback through new technology is noted to increase students' motivation, interest, and encourages in-depth research on the subjects they are studying, benefiting from the interconnected concepts on the web through hyperlinks. Pinkman (2005) and other researchers, including Kessler & Bikowski (2010), who explored learner autonomy development through blog and wiki participation, respectively, emphasized that engaging in discussions and receiving feedback can motivate students to experiment more frequently with the target language, leading to successful completion of activities. Consequently, learning with technological assistance promotes a range of skills, including literacy, critical thinking, reasoning, analysis, organization of information, selection of valuable data, communication, creativity, autonomy, and collaboration.

According to Lam (2004), as cited in Dang (2012), highly motivated learners commonly engage in passive learning activities such as watching television or videos, listening to songs, and reading books or magazines. However, they occasionally use the Internet for educational purposes, utilizing virtual communities to reflect on their learning practices and share experiences with others.

### 2.3. Using technology for self-assessment in language learning

The integration of technology for self-assessment in language learning has emerged as a valuable and dynamic educational approach. With the advent of various digital tools and platforms, language learners can now engage in self-assessment activities that enhance their proficiency and autonomy. Technology provides learners with interactive applications, online quizzes, and language learning apps that allow them to evaluate their language skills, identify areas for improvement, and track their progress over time. This personalized feedback loop empowers learners to take control of their learning journey, fostering a sense of autonomy and responsibility. Overall, the utilization of technology for self-assessment not only makes the language learning process more dynamic and engaging but also contributes significantly to the development of learners' linguistic competence.

### III. IMPLICATIONS

Firstly, educators should dedicate more effort to fostering learner autonomy to aid students in enhancing their language proficiency. If there are challenges in implementing autonomy in classrooms, schools could assign tasks or activities that students can undertake beyond regular class hours.

Secondly, teachers should introduce diverse activities to inspire students to learn a language, influencing the development of learner autonomy. Although a direct cause-and-effect relationship between motivation and learner autonomy was not established, teachers believed that more motivated students tend to be more autonomous, and conversely, more autonomous students exhibit greater motivation in language learning. Consequently, teachers should present engaging tasks that students willingly participate in.

Finally, student involvement in classroom activities, such as decision-making regarding course topics or activities is crucial. Teachers and researchers should be mindful that any teaching method aimed

at promoting learner autonomy will immediately impact language learning. This awareness is a necessary condition for successful language learning and, concurrently, for the development of learner autonomy.

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