

Understanding the Concept of Learner Autonomy in the Context of Second and Foreign
Language Learning: Definitions, Misconceptions, and Applications

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Abstract

Learner autonomy has been one of the most widely discussed concepts in the field of second and foreign language teaching as the learner-centered approaches to instruction have become more important. However, some scholars warn language teachers about 'learner autonomy' as being the field's new 'buzz' word which has been used frequently without an in-depth apprehension. Two basic challenges for teachers in terms of creating more autonomy-embracing language learning environments for learners are: (a) interpreting what learner autonomy, a very broad and abstract concept, really means in the context of second and foreign language learning; and (b) putting the theory into action by understanding the methods and procedures of promoting learner autonomy in language classrooms. This paper addresses those two challenges by delivering a comprehensive discussion of the definitions, misconceptions, and applications of learner autonomy. It is hoped that such a discussion will provide introductory information and guidance for language teachers who wish to foster learner autonomy in their classrooms. The paper unfolds in three main sections: the first section is devoted to better understanding the concept of learner autonomy by visiting different definitions and misconceptions of this term, the second section aims at helping the reader further concretize the concept of learner autonomy by answering the question 'what makes learner autonomy important and desirable?', and the last section focuses on putting the theory into action by discussing various approaches to fostering learner autonomy in different language learning settings.

Keywords: learner autonomy, autonomous learning, language teaching