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"Fostering Autonomous Learning in University Language Students: Best Teaching Practices to Encourage Life-Long Learning "

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FOSTERING AUTONOMOUS LEARNING IN UNIVERSITY LANGUAGE
STUDENTS: BEST TEACHING PRACTICES TO ENCOURAGE LIFE-LONG
LEARNING

by

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A capstone project submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages.

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

Language learning is more important in today's global world than it has ever been before. This is especially true for students who desire to learn English, as it is commonly used throughout the world. Of course, learning a language is not an easy feat and an individual's success in learning is dependent upon many variables such as age, exposure to the language, availability of quality teachers, and motivation just to name a few (Lightbrown & Spada, 2013). For years, many students have chosen classroom learning as a primary method of language learning, especially before technology made learning materials more accessible.

Learning a language is a massive undertaking and it is difficult to learn a language by only attending classes with a teacher. If students really want to work toward mastery of a language, it is beneficial for them to seek outside resources and opportunities for practice on their own. This is especially true for adults learning a language at the university level. Many students studying English at the university level already have some knowledge of the language and are pursuing further studies either as a requirement or because they feel a desire to increase their English language skills. However, for some students, learning on their own is difficult. Some students may lack the motivation to continue learning outside of class and others simply are unsure of how to learn on their own. Language teachers may not know how to help foster autonomy in their students or

do not view their students' learning outside of the classroom as their responsibility. However, if teachers want their students to really succeed in a language, helping them to become autonomous learners is important (Orawiwatnakul & Wichadee, 2017). The discussion around autonomous learning is often clouded by differences in the definition of autonomy and there are limited, accessible resources available to teachers on how they can help their students. Therefore, this project seeks to answer the question: *how can teachers of English as a foreign language at the university level help their students become successful, autonomous learners?*

In this chapter, my background in language learning and teaching, as well as how this subject of research came to be is discussed. The importance of this topic is discussed as well as the context and rationale for the project. A brief overview of the entire capstone is also provided.

My Experiences in Language Learning

Despite growing up in a monolingual household, I have had an interest in languages for a very long time. Both of my parents spoke a little bit of German and, in fact, my maternal grandfather's native language was German. Therefore, growing up, I was exposed to the German language. At that point, I did not explicitly acknowledge it as another language; the basic words and phrases I used were just an accepted part of my lexicon. Once I got to middle school, my school was experimenting with teaching languages. At some point, we had one semester of French and one semester of German. It was at this point I started to really understand that these are entire languages, like my own, that other people use in their everyday lives.

I loved learning languages. In high school I took three years of Spanish and then when I got to university, I studied German for two semesters and chose linguistics as a minor. Upon graduation from university, I worked as an administrative specialist for a crime bureau and enjoyed it but I really missed languages. Had linguistics been offered as a major at my university I would have done that, but at that time it was only a minor. I wanted to find a way to continue studying languages and linguistics, so I started taking Mandarin Chinese classes in the evenings.

One morning I was walking into work and a man stopped me in the parking lot. He had a criminal background check done for a job and he explained to me that the crime bureau had given him the results on a piece of paper but would not explain it to him. He explained that he had only recently immigrated to the United States and, while he could speak English, he struggled to read it and was wondering if I could help him. The paper he was given contained a long paragraph full of legal jargon all just to say that he had no criminal record. So, I explained it to him and pointed out where it said he had no record. He was so thankful that I was willing to take the time out of my day to help him. This brief encounter made me reflect on how difficult it must be to immigrate to a country where you are not confident with the language. It was this that inspired me to get a Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) certificate.

My Language Teaching Experience

 I completed Hamline University's TEFL certificate program and I began volunteer teaching English at a learning center in Minneapolis, Minnesota in the evenings. My students were adult refugees primarily from Somalia who were learning

English to gain citizenship and to integrate into society. Despite what some may believe, in my experience most refugees would rather not have to leave their home country, their culture, and the familiarity of their life behind to start over in a new country. Some of my students loved the United States and were so happy to be here and excited to learn English. Others, understandably, were not. This is when I first noticed how much of a difference motivation can have on language learning. At this point, I was privileged in that I had never had to learn a foreign language out of necessity. So, I had never really considered the role that motivation plays because I had learned languages for fun and was intrinsically motivated by my own enjoyment of language. It was very clear who was using English on a daily basis and studying on their own and who was not. At this time too, I also started applying to jobs teaching abroad because I had always wanted to live in another country and thought this would be a great opportunity. I was offered a job teaching elementary age students in Korea.

While teaching students in Korea, I continued to see how great of a difference there was in the levels of highly motivated and unmotivated students. I was teaching a class for middle school students whose English level was more advanced and a student showed me a book she was using to study on her own. This student's English level was pretty good, not the best in the class but not the worst. This book that she was using to self-study was a vocabulary book aimed at college students studying English. In my opinion, this book was generally not a great resource; it was just a conglomeration of very advanced-level vocabulary. Some of the terms in this book were so specialized that I, as an educated, native speaker of English, had never used them and probably never

would. While I admired this student's enthusiasm, it became apparent to me that, even when students are highly motivated and willing to put in extra effort outside of class, they may struggle to understand how or what they should be studying as well as what resources will be useful to them.

After my two-year contract teaching at the elementary school ended, I began teaching online. I taught both children aged four to fifteen and adults. Again, I noticed how important motivation can be. Some of my young students loved English and studied very hard before every class. For other students, it was clear that they attended their classes solely to appease their parents and made very little progress. My young students all lived in China so their opportunities to practice English outside of classes and school are likely limited unless their parents also happen to speak English. My adult students were primarily native Spanish or Portuguese speakers living in Mexico, Central, or South America. A few of them also lived in the United States. These students had sought out language classes either to improve their education or job prospects or to improve their standard of living while living in the United States. Therefore, I found many of these students to be highly motivated, but many of them expressed that they were unsure how to practice languages outside of class when they did not live in an English speaking country. I found that, as a teacher, it was important for me to provide them with materials they could access outside of class to really help them further their English skills.

Capstone Context and Rationale

These realizations of the importance of motivation and an understanding of how to self-study or self-teach are what led me to the topic of this capstone. This current

project is aimed at helping teachers of university students and adults, but much of what will be covered may also be helpful to teachers teaching lower age groups. University and adult students were chosen because these students are often taking language classes to fulfill a major requirement or to increase job prospects (Kormos & Csizér, 2013). Therefore, these students can benefit from being able to take their learning into their own hands to reach their personal goals. It is unlikely that students are going to become competent users of a language solely from classroom instruction. It is imperative that they understand how to further their skills on their own. Much of the research in this area has worked to define what learner autonomy is and has focused on how technology and different resources can help students to learn independently (Joshi, 2011; Little, 2007; Pemberton, 1993; Reinders, 2006, 2010). However, there is a lack of solid resources that give teachers implementable methods and techniques that they can use to help foster autonomy within their own students. That is what I intend to do with this capstone project. I created professional development workshops aimed at university and adult English second language or foreign language teachers to explain to them why fostering learner autonomy to help their students become life-long learners is important and ideas of how they can attempt it within their own classrooms. This professional development could be presented to teachers through workshops or language teaching conferences.

Personal and Professional Significance

This project is of personal significance to me due to my role as an English as a foreign language (EFL) teacher. I plan to implement what I learn through this capstone project with my current adult students. I also hope to one day teach in a university upon

completion of my master's degree and hope that what I learn from this project will be valuable to my future teaching. Like all teachers, I want to see my students succeed and I do everything I can to make that happen.

It is my hope that other teachers can benefit from this project as well. I hope to help teachers understand why learner autonomy is so important and provide them with the tools and resources that are currently lacking or non-existent.

Summary

In this chapter, I outlined my previous experiences with both language learning and teaching. My desire to help others navigate the complicated world of English is what led me to teach English. Furthermore, seeing differences in motivation as well and difficulties with self-teaching within my students led me to my research question posed in this capstone: *how can teachers of English as a foreign language at the university level help their students become successful, autonomous learners?* The aim of this project is to help teachers understand why they should encourage autonomous learning within their students and provide teachers guidance on how to do so.

In chapter two, I provide a literature review of relevant definitions and practices in fostering learner autonomy. In chapter three, I provide a description of my project and chapter four contains my reflections and conclusions from my project.

CHAPTER TWO

Literature Review

Introduction

When a student learns a foreign language, in-classroom learning is a common option. This may have been especially true in the past when there was not as much access to technology and, therefore, independent learning materials were possibly less accessible. Today, many different options are available to students, especially those willing to further their learning on their own outside of the classroom. In this chapter, previous research on learner autonomy and the different roles played by students and teachers are discussed.

This chapter begins with a discussion of definitions of relevant terms. When reviewing literature in this area of teaching, there are many terms that are encountered. Researchers debate many of these definitions including key terms such as *autonomous*. It is important to discuss terminology because understanding how a researcher defines a particular term is necessary to understand their research.

Following the discussion of relevant terms and the research behind them, the teacher's roles in autonomous learning are evaluated. It may seem that autonomous learning aims to remove the teacher from the picture but quite the opposite is true. Many students are not aware of how to learn independently and, therefore, require the assistance of a teacher. The teacher plays many roles in the process of encouraging and improving students' ability to learn autonomously. The roles of the teacher help inform

the project by providing best practices and methods based on research that teachers can employ to better help their students.

The third section of this chapter evaluates the student's role in autonomous learning. Naturally, students play a big role in the autonomous learning process. It is up to them to understand and accept the process and to do their best to implement it. This section discusses how students view autonomy, what skills they need to develop, and how they view their role in their learning. It is important to see this from the student's point of view because without it, the teacher is unaware of how to best help their students.

The final section of this chapter investigates different methods that can be utilized by teachers to implement autonomous learning. There are myriad different methods and activities teachers can use to enhance autonomy in their students. This section discusses general frameworks teachers can implement into their teaching as well as different ideas that can be utilized. This helps inform suggestions of what teachers can do in the final project.

Definitions

The idea of learners being independent and finding intrinsic motivation is not a new concept. However, defining terms related to learner autonomy and independence has proved difficult for researchers thus far. There are numerous different terms used and much debate on how to define them and which ones have similar meanings. Self-access learning and blended learning are two terms that often come up in discussions on

autonomous learning. After a discussion on those types of learning and their definitions, a more thorough discussion of what autonomous learning is often defined as will follow.

Self-Access Learning

In an attempt to make learners more independent and help them find ways to learn on their own, many schools and universities have created self-access language learning centers. These centers typically have computers and resources available to students that they can use outside of normal classroom learning. These centers aim to accommodate all students regardless of their language level or learning style. In discussions of autonomous learning, self-access learning often comes up but how to define it is a subject of debate. Reinders (2006) defined self-access learning simply as learning that takes place in a self-access center. Under this definition, students accessing materials and studying on their own outside of an institution would not be considered to be self-access learning. This contrasts with other definitions such as that provided by Barrs (2011) who defined self-access language learning (SALL) as a move toward independence in learning and the ability to lead one's own learning with less reliance on the teacher. Under this definition, self-access learning is the process of helping learners to become independent in their learning and is not referring to learning on one's own. This definition does not restrict self-access learning to a specific place.

Blended Learning

Blended learning is another term that is persistent in literature related to independent learning. Good teaching practice has always involved using a variety of different teaching styles, methods, and activities. However, explicitly using the term

blended learning is a relatively new phenomenon that came about with the computer. Initially, it was used to mean supplementing traditional classroom learning with online learning. Today, it is used the same way, but it can also be used to discuss blending different methodologies and learning environments. Blended learning has been found to promote student-centered learning, and provide flexibility in learning outside of the classroom (Marsh, 2012).

Autonomous Learning

The term *autonomous learning* is a relatively common term but is often used interchangeably with many other terms. Researchers disagree on which terms have the same or similar definitions. According to Joshi (2011), most researchers agree that the terms *autonomy* and *autonomous learning* cannot be defined the same way as the terms *self-instruction, self-access, self-study, self-education, out-of-class learning, or distance learning*. The same article also stated that these terms are used to mean the ways that one can learn on their own while autonomy is more specific to the student's individual ability to learn on their own. A student can study by themselves without the guidance or influence of others, but that does not mean that they can learn by themselves. There are also terms that some researchers consider to mean the same thing as autonomous learning. These include: learner independence, self-direction, and independent learning (Du, 2012; Karatas, Alci, Yurtseven, and Yüksel, 2015). In a study that specifically examined self-directed learning, it was defined as students taking control over their learning process by setting goals, identifying resources, and evaluating outcomes (Du, 2012). Pemberton (1996) considered autonomy to be a capacity while self-directed

learning is a way of organizing one's learning. One of the difficulties in defining learner autonomy is that researchers often look at different aspects of it when creating their definition. Many times, the terms *ability* or *capacity* are used in these definitions and those two terms are often used interchangeably (Bekleyen and Selimoğlu, 2016). Reinders (2010) pointed out that in some cases the term *autonomy* is used to embody motivation, awareness, and interaction into one cohesive term. Reinders (2010) also stated that very few researchers have attempted to quantify autonomy. It is unlikely that autonomy could be broken down into something measurable because the term is usually used to encompass so many different things. This is likely why there is not a single, systematic way for learner autonomy to be easily integrated with classroom learning.

Benson and Voller (1997) strayed away from defining and instead provided five situations in which the term *learner autonomy* can be used. The first situation is when students study entirely on their own. This could mean, for example, when people study a language on their own as a hobby and not for a class. The second situation is when learners are working to acquire skills that can be learned and applied in a self-directed setting. In this case, their definition of self-directed learning seems to be most aligned with Pemberton (1996) where autonomy is the ability to learn while self-directed learning is the process of organization. The third situation is when students already have the capacity to work and learn autonomously but they are unable to do so due to constraints placed on them by educational institutions. The fourth is when learners proactively take responsibility for their own learning. The fifth and final situation where the term autonomy can be used is when discussing learners' rights to choose how, when, and what

they will learn. These five situations show that Benson and Voller (1997) attempted to incorporate many of the above-discussed definitions for autonomy.

After looking through all of the research, there is one definition in particular that most researchers discussed and tended to use in their own research. That is the definition given by Holec (1981), which stated that autonomy is, *"the ability to take charge of one's own learning"* (p. 3). This is one of the earlier attempts at defining learner autonomy and it is still commonly referenced in more modern works. It is also important to note that most literature does not consider autonomous learning to mean learning alone (Marsh, 2012). Autonomous learning typically involves the capacity to learn independently and manage one's learning but neither of these necessarily have to be done alone. Lee (1998) considered voluntariness, learner choice, flexibility, teacher support, and peer support to all be essential parts of learner autonomy. This is not necessarily a definition of autonomy, but more a list of what is needed for learner autonomy to be successful. However, this list leaves out capacity or ability within the learner which seems to be an essential part of autonomy when all of the given definitions are considered.

Self-access learning and blended learning are typically mentioned in discussions of learner autonomy and they are related to the topic as they provide ways of engaging in autonomous learning. Defining autonomous learning itself has proved to be difficult (Bekleyen, Selimoğlu, 2016; Karatas, Alci, Yurtseven, Yüksel, 2015). There are many similar terms that researchers agree do not carry the same meaning as autonomous learning (Joshi, 2011; Pemberton, 1993; Reinders, 2006, 2010). However, learner independence, self-directed learning, and independent learning can be considered to mean

the same thing and they typically refer to a student's ability or capacity to learn on their

own (Du, 2012; Karatas, 2015). Many researchers doing studies on this topic seem to

prefer the definition of autonomy given by Holec (1981) which stated that autonomy is,

"*the ability to take charge of one's own learning*" (as cited in Bekleyen & Selimoğlu

2016, p. 1; Joshi, 2011, p.13; Little, 2007, p.15). This is the definition that will be used

going forward in this capstone. The terms *independent learning* and *autonomous learning*

are used interchangeably following this definition.

Understanding the various terms and definitions related to this topic are essential

in helping us to answer the question: *how can teachers of English as a foreign language*

at the university level help their students become successful, autonomous learners? The

next section goes more in-depth about the roles teachers play in encouraging autonomous

learning in their students. The different roles are discussed as well as the importance of

teaching students how to learn.

The Teacher's Roles

As mentioned previously, because autonomy is not easily quantifiable, there is no

one systematic way that teachers can help their students to be more autonomous learners.

It would seem that the idea of autonomous learning may be to remove the teacher from

the equation entirely. This is not true and, in fact, the teacher plays a very important role

in encouraging and increasing learner autonomy among their students. According to

Little (2007), autonomy is a process where the teacher gradually gives more

independence to the students in a systematic fashion. The teacher slowly allows students

to take more responsibility for their own learning. Support from the teacher and

involvement in a learning community are still essential for even the most autonomous students (Reinders, 2006). In order for teachers to successfully implement autonomous learning, teachers need to be knowledgeable of the learning process and their influence on it. Teachers must understand pedagogy and be skilled in management (Camilleri, 1999).

Teachers in the Autonomous Classroom

A teacher who wants students capable of learning on their own has many roles to play. According to Joshi (2011), in autonomous learning, the teacher acts as a facilitator, organizer, resource, and provider of feedback and encouragement. Little, Hodel, Kohonen, Meijer, and Perclova (2007) provided three more specific roles that a teacher has in encouraging their students to learn more independently in the language classroom. First, teachers should allow students to become more involved in their learning process. Students should have some say over their learning objectives and goals. This can help students realize things they would like to learn that they will need additional resources outside of the classroom to achieve. Second, teachers should encourage learners to reflect on their learning and reflect on the target language. Finally, the teacher should promote appropriate target language use among their students. Overall, the teacher's primary role is to help and support their students. The goal of learner autonomy is usually that students are able to learn independently and not rely on their teacher. However, often teachers will have to help students learn these skills (Du, 2012, 2013; Kormos and Csizér, 2013).

Helping Students Become Autonomous

Some students have a lot of intrinsic motivation and do not need much assistance from the teacher when it comes to learning autonomy. However, some students may need a lot of support in acquiring the skills needed. If learners are not explicitly taught how to learn on their own and are not prepared to choose materials that will suit their learning and their goals, they will have problems learning autonomously. Studies have found that access to resources is not sufficient in helping students learn on their own (Reinders, 2010). Therefore, it is the responsibility of the teacher to help students develop competency in autonomy (Du, 2013). To do this, teachers must provide their students with direction, reassurance, and support. Teachers should help students create goals, understand different strategies for learning, and help them to locate resources for their learning. The teacher should act more as a manager of the learning experience and less of a provider of knowledge. It is also imperative that teachers provide an orientation to autonomous learning and also a way for students and the teacher to assess where the students are at now and where they want to be in order to set useful goals (Du, 2012, 2013). That initial orientation is essential and throughout the course it can be useful to continue to teach the skills needed for autonomy. This can include things like time management and different ways to find learning opportunities outside of the classroom. Setting goals alone will not promote autonomous learning. Students need guidance on how they can meet their goals outside of the classroom (Kormos & Csizér, 2013).

Students should also have opportunities to work together to discuss study methods and resources that work for them and that do not work. It is also important to keep in mind that there could be some resistance from students if the concept of learning outside

of the classroom and outside of the prescribed syllabus from the teacher is very new to them. You must provide the reason for implementing this and move at a pace that is comfortable for your students and not overwhelming (Reinders, 2010). In order to properly guide students, the teacher must be able to help map out a path that will be available and useful to students and their learning but also foresee the potential consequences of different paths. The teacher must inform students of different resources available and different methods and strategies for learning. It is also important that the teacher can foresee potential problems in a student's learning and help counteract these problems before they occur (Joshi, 2011). Sometimes, encouraging autonomous learning is uncomfortable for teachers, especially those accustomed to being the transmitter of knowledge rather than helping students learn how to learn. Implementing autonomous learning is not easy and some teachers may feel very unprepared (Du, 2013).

Student Expectations of Teachers

Researchers have laid out what roles the teacher needs to play in order to help students become successful independent learners. Students also have opinions on what role their teachers should play in helping them learn how to learn. In a study done by Bekleyen and Selimoğlu (2016) in which students at a university in Turkey were asked what they thought the teacher's role should be, most of the students felt that teachers should be responsible for choosing the activities in their courses and deciding what the students should learn next. In essence, they felt that course planning is the teacher's role. This could be problematic because it shows the students feel they need the teacher as a guide to determine what they should learn next. Bekleyen and Selimoğlu (2016) felt it is

therefore important for teachers to determine their students' thoughts and assumptions about autonomous learning before trying to help them do it.

In a separate study that involved university students in Hong Kong (Chan, 2001), the researcher implemented autonomous learning as part of a class. Students expressed that they liked it when the teacher explained what and how they were learning but they also liked receiving problems to work through on their own and to be able to realize their own mistakes. These students saw the teacher as a resource and facilitator but also felt the teacher should instruct and that the teacher had the dominant role in the language learning process. Another study on students learning Chinese in a university in the western United States (Du, 2013) found that students most wanted one-on-one, individualized feedback and were unsatisfied with the generic feedback they received on work they had undertaken autonomously through a portfolio project. It is important that teachers understand their student's desired outcomes from a course and what they expect of the teacher. Teachers must understand students' perceptions of autonomous learning in order to know how to motivate their students and help them accomplish their goals. According to Karatas, Alci, Yurtseven, and Yüksel (2015), classes must be designed to promote students' intrinsic motivation to help them better achieve autonomy and overall academic achievement.

On the surface, it would seem that autonomous learning removes the teacher but, in fact, the teacher plays many important roles in fostering autonomous learning. The teacher must act as a facilitator, organizer, resource, and provide encouragement. Many students are unfamiliar with autonomous learning or are uncomfortable with it. For this

reason, teachers must teach students the skills they need to improve their abilities to learn on their own. It is important that teachers understand how familiar their students are with autonomous learning and their view of it in order to decide how to best help them move forward.

This section plays an important part in answering the question: *how can teachers of English as a foreign language at the university level help their students become successful, autonomous learners?* When implementing autonomous learning in the classroom, teachers have many important roles to play and it is essential that they understand these various roles if they are to help their students become independent learners.

The following section further explores the roles students must play in autonomous learning. Students' knowledge and views of autonomy are also discussed as well as why it is imperative that teachers know how their students view autonomous learning.

The Student's Roles

Teachers and students both play an important role in autonomous learning. Some students may be more apprehensive than others to engage in autonomous learning but it is so important that they learn how to do so. Students living in a country where their target language is not spoken by the majority cannot learn the language solely in the classroom. It is just not possible for classroom learning to provide enough opportunities for interaction and language use. This is why it is so important that students take advantage of outside learning opportunities or create them (Kormos and Csizér, 2013). When students engage in autonomous learning, they are able to gain additional knowledge to

bring back to the classroom which can help make the classroom environment more interesting and engaging (Orawiwatnakul and Wichadee, 2017).

Culture's Effect on Student Autonomy

According to Bekleyen and Selimoğlu (2016) it is often mentioned in the literature is that some feel the concept of autonomy is primarily a western concept and may not work as well in other contexts such as Asia. However, it is wrong to assume that all people educated in one particular culture will behave the same way or hold similar beliefs. Learners from Asian cultures are often stereotyped as obedient and passive learners who view the teacher as the primary source of all information. This is simply not the case and it is important that we do not let stereotypes dictate how we treat our students or choose to educate them (Bekleyen and Selimoğlu, 2016). Regardless of the teaching context, it is imperative that teachers judge all students equally and work to understand students' current views and knowledge of autonomous learning so that we can best help them implement it.

Students' Views of Autonomy

As mentioned previously, it is important that teachers work to find out their student's knowledge of learner autonomy and their feelings about it. Orawiwatnakul and Wichadee (2017), found a positive relationship between how students felt about learner autonomy and their language learning behaviors outside of class. Students who felt learner autonomy is important and useful to their learning engaged in it to a high degree outside of class. These students also tended to have higher levels of English proficiency. Students who did not feel as positive about learner autonomy were often less successful

in their learning and placed more responsibility on the teacher to guide them in every step

of their learning (Orawiwatnakul and Wichadee, 2017).

Motivation is also strongly linked to learner autonomy (Kormos and Csizér,

2013). Students who were more motivated and willing to put additional effort into their

learning were often more likely to self-regulate and were less likely to have difficulties

with boredom or time management.

Necessary Traits of Autonomous Learners

For students to be successful in learning independently, they should be both

responsible and aware of their learning so that they are better able to understand how to

learn (Joshi, 2011). Time management is also an essential skill for students. They must

learn how to manage their time to avoid procrastinating (Marsh, 2012). This is important

to being a good student in general but good time management skills are imperative to

being a successful autonomous learner. If students cannot manage their time well, they

will struggle to reach their goals. Motivation is, of course, another key component to

successful independent learning. Students must find what motivates them and find ways

to stay motivated. Sometimes, students are required to take a language class that they do

not necessarily want to take. This is when it becomes even more important that students

find something to motivate them so that their learning endeavors will be successful. One

example is that students in Hungary stated that their primary motivation for studying

English is its status as a world language (Kormos and Csizér, 2013). Chan (2001) listed

six abilities that students need to develop in order to become successful autonomous

learners which include: the ability to set learning goals, developing learning strategies to

achieve those goals, creating study plans, self-reflection, the ability to identify and select relevant resources, and the ability to assess one's own progress. Initially, it is important that students get support from a teacher in all of these skills but it will be useful for students to develop these skills and be able to implement them on their own over time.

Students' View of Their Role in Developing Autonomy

A study by Chan (2001) asked students from Hong Kong what role they felt they should play in developing their ability to learn independently. Almost half of the students believed that they should be involved in the selection of course content, learning tasks, and activities. They also thought it was important for the teacher to take their ideas about learning into consideration. The majority of students wanted some responsibility for their own learning and wanted to assess their own progress. Also, a large majority believed that they could become effective learners if they were given instruction on how to learn and the overall learning process. The students also liked working in groups, pairs, and as a whole class. Overall, the students had a very positive attitude towards autonomous learning which further showed that one cannot stereotype how students will feel about independent learning based on their background (Chan, 2001).

This section suggested that students tended to have differing opinions of autonomy and what their role and the teacher's role should be. Some students believed that most of the responsibility for learning fell on the teacher while other students felt they should be more responsible for their own learning. No matter how students feel about autonomous learning, it is important that teachers do not play into stereotypes associated with their students. Teachers must not only understand their role but also what

the role of the student is and what it is not in order to answer the question: *how can teachers of English as a foreign language at the university level help their students become successful, autonomous learners?*

The next section focuses on different ways learner autonomy has been implemented into the classroom. General findings of what students and teachers want as well as different methods and activities used are discussed.

Implementation of Autonomous Learning

Fostering learner autonomy to help students further their knowledge of a language and turn them into life-long learners is important, but implementing it is not a black and white process. Implementation can be a very slow process depending on students' familiarity with autonomy and their willingness to pursue it. It is important that activities in the autonomous classroom setting allow for student involvement and many different types of activities and interactions (Chan, 2001). There are many different methods teachers can use when attempting to make their students more autonomous. The method a teacher chooses depends on myriad factors such as the wants and needs of their students and what technology or resources are available to themselves and their students.

General Implementation

It is generally understood that encouraging students to be autonomous learners is important but implementing it is not an easy task. Generally, students should be encouraged to play an active role in their learning as the teacher gradually steps away and lets the students take control over their learning process (Orawiwatnakul & Wichadee, 2017). There tends to be an agreement that students need a study plan to help guide their

learning and help them reach their goals. It is important that teachers regularly review these study plans to help make sure they are realistic and to keep the students on track (Marsh, 2012). Reinders (2010) laid out one example of a general framework for implementing autonomous learning. The first step is identifying needs. Students need to see their strengths and weaknesses as well as what they desire to work on. The next step is goal setting followed by planning the learning. Planning out how they will learn helps students determine how they will reach their goals. Next is selecting resources and learning strategies based on that learning plan. At this point, students need to put everything into action and start practicing their language. From there, students and teachers must monitor progress and regularly assess and revise the plan to be sure students are on track to meet their goals. The teacher's role in all of this is to first instruct students on how to learn and different strategies they can try. Without this explicit instruction, autonomous learning will not have the desired outcome for many students (Reinders, 2010). This was echoed in another study by Lee (1998) who found that students must receive training at the beginning of the program and throughout. Lee (1998) also mentioned that helping students find ways to stay motivated can be very beneficial. Also, both Lee (1998) and Reinders (2010) maintained that the teacher should act as an advisor or counselor for students helping guide them along the way. Lee also found that students need a genuine choice when selecting resources and activities. Collaborative learning is also useful so that students can share strategies and do peer work. Du (2013) also emphasized the importance of collaborative peer work alongside

more structured learning.

Integrating Technology

Technology has made it easier than ever for students to learn and study a language independently. In many parts of the world, today's students have access to computers and smartphones. However, as Barrs (2011) pointed out, it is important that technology introduced into the classroom is normalized. It has to be such a regular part of everyday life that students are comfortable in using it and do not have to waste time learning how to use it. Whether or not technology can be useful to autonomous learning really depends on the student's location and the types of technology available to them. If students do not have access to computers outside of school, integrating computer learning with classroom learning may not be ideal.

In countries where smartphones are common, they can be a great way to encourage autonomous learning. Barrs (2011) found that students used their smartphones for language learning in a number of different ways. These included: using the camera to take pictures of board work in class, recording lectures, using flashcard applications as well as English language news apps, and using voice recognition technology to practice their pronunciation. Another study specifically explored students' use of mobile phone applications in their language learning (Niño, 2015). Many students used apps in place of a paper dictionary in order to look up words, translate, and look for definitions. They also used apps for listening to pronunciation and practicing vocabulary. Students found that apps were useful in increasing their vocabulary and allowing for extra practice at any time and in any place. Apps also made review easier and more fun. Most of the students

in this study also agreed that it may be helpful for instructors to add the use of apps into their classes (Niño, 2015).

When teachers opt to integrate technology into their classrooms and encourage students to use technology as a way to study independently and further their knowledge, it is important that teachers carefully plan how they will do so. Naturally, more highly motivated students may be using technology to improve their learning outside of class on their own, but not all students will. Marsh (2012) gave some examples of how this can be done including: teaching students how to be independent learners early in the course, create an online space for students to discuss their learning and give advice, help students assess their own strengths and weaknesses to help them find appropriate materials and activities online, utilize a flipped classroom approach that requires students to complete certain tasks before class time, and finally help students design a study plan.

Learning Journals and Portfolios

The use of learning journals and portfolios is not new to language learning but can be effective in enhancing student's abilities to study their target language independently. According to Du (2012), there are some key features that should be included in a learning journal in order to really improve students' independent learning skills. Students should utilize journals to reflect on their learning and set goals. The teacher should provide clear, specific objectives for the students as well as feedback that is personalized to each student. These journals do not necessarily have to be a documentation of the learning, but rather can serve as a way to analyze the learning process. Students can record what methods they are using to study and how effective they are. This way, students can see

what they have been working on and whether or not it is actually helping them with their learning (Du, 2012).

One example of this was done in a study by Kemp (2009), where students were asked to keep a listening log where they recorded their experiences with listening. Students were able to choose their own listening tasks. In the end, these logs helped students see if there was variety in what they chose to listen to, as well as what was useful to their learning and what was not. They were also able to look back and analyze why some listening situations turned out better than others. Students became more aware of different situations and found they were better able to prepare for them in the future. It also improved their motivation. Students were able to reflect on their activities and see where their understanding broke down and that often motivated them to work harder so they could understand similar situations in the future (Kemp, 2009). Another study by Du (2013) required students to write portfolios based on news texts. Not only did creating these portfolios improve their ability to read news texts, they also learned how to prioritize tasks, find new resources, and evaluate their learning on their own. They also improved their reading strategies in their foreign language.

Other Activities

When teaching a language, it is important that all aspects of the language are taught including: reading, writing, speaking, and listening. There are many ways teachers can encourage their students to work on these skills outside of class.

Group Work and Projects. Group work has long been used in the classroom to encourage students to practice and work on the language together. Whether students are

practicing the language or completing a project in a group, working with a group provides more opportunities for interaction. In the classroom, the teacher can still encourage autonomy by allowing groups to choose their own activity and desired outcome of the group work (Little, 2007). Group projects can also be beneficial to students as they can make students accountable to their peers instead of their teacher which can also help foster autonomy (Marsh, 2012).

      Writing. Writing is another important aspect of language learning. Whether completed as part of pair or group work or individually, there are ways to use writing activities to encourage autonomy. One way to encourage autonomy through writing activities is by allowing students to make posters summarizing their learning plans, or listing useful vocabulary, idioms, and grammar. Students can also be asked to keep learning journals (Little, 2007). It is important to give students some freedom as to what to include in their journals. There are many options including recording new grammar with example sentences or more advanced types of writings like stories or summaries. Journals are a great resource in autonomous learning because they allow the students to see where they struggle with writing and their progress over time. Giving students space to write collaboratively can also improve autonomous learning skills. Teachers who want to implement more technology can allow students to create and share blogs where they can comment on each other's writing and provide feedback. These also serve a similar purpose to a writing journal by allowing students to see their weaknesses in writing and their progress. Utilizing class wiki sites where all of the students contribute one piece of a bigger project can also be a useful activity (Warschauer and Liaw, 2011).

Listening and Speaking. Listening is arguably the easiest skill for students to work on outside of class. There are many options for listening such as music, television, and movies. Podcasts are another great option and students can personalize the activity by choosing topics or genres that are most interesting to them. Podcasts can also be used for speaking practice. Students can create them to share with classmates or as an audio diary where they can hear their improvement in their speaking over time (Warschauer & Liaw, 2011). One study found that listening activities are in fact one of the most common activities students engaged in outside of the classroom. Bekleyen and Selimoğlu (2016), found that the most common activities among a group of students was listening to English songs and watching English movies or TV shows. Their least preferred activity to engage in outside of class was writing. Listening is often a very important skill for students to practice autonomously. They get some listening practice in the classroom but, especially if they live in a country where their target language is not widely spoken, their opportunities to practice listening in the target language are very limited unless they find outside resources (Kemp, 2009).

Having options available for implementation will help teachers to find the best, most effective way to integrate autonomous learning in their classroom and answer the question, *how can teachers of English as a foreign language at the university level help their students become successful, autonomous learners?* In the final section of this chapter, self-access centers and electronic learning environments will be discussed as methods of implementation on a larger scale.

Self-Access Centers and Electronic Learning Environments

Self-access centers (SAC) are physical places where students can go to study and find resources on their own. The University of Auckland created a SAC for their ESL students in an attempt to help them gain independent learning skills (Reinders, 2006). They also created an electronic learning environment within their SAC. This is a computer program that can help students determine what they need to work on the most, make goals and study plans, find resources, track what they have learned, as well as measure the progress of their learning. Overall, students said that the SAC and ELE were helpful to them and they spent a lot of time in the SAC. Despite this, very few students actually used the ELE and the ones who did mostly did not follow through with it or used it in a way that would not be helpful to them, such as setting unrealistic goals. Most students did not utilize the needs analysis, even though the computer and staff repeatedly asked them to do so. While students did enjoy using the SAC as a place to practice their English outside of the classroom, the researcher attributed the failure of the ELE to students who had a lower than expected level of English as well as students who were not experienced in autonomous learning (Reinders, 2006).

It is likely that students would benefit from having proper training and support on how to learn independently and how to use the ELE. The researcher later found that having students start by working with a language advisor helped them improve their independent learning skills and they then benefited more from the ELE (Reinders, 2006). A later study by Reinders (2010) more closely explored the SAC. In the first study, students often used the resources available in the SAC, such as textbooks, but because

they were unfamiliar with autonomous learning and did not take proper advantage of the ELE, it is hard to say how helpful the resources really were for the students. The researcher stated that materials used in autonomous learning, and available to student use in a SAC, must be useful to students who are learning without the aid of a teacher. This means that materials should have clear, easy to understand instructions and answer keys. It is also still important that students are encouraged to reflect on their learning (Reinders, 2010). Self-access learning centers can be very beneficial to students, especially those that have limited opportunities to use their target language outside of the classroom. However, this is something that an institution often needs to create and cannot be done by the teacher alone.

Conclusions

Autonomous learning is something that some students will do on their own while others will need a lot of guidance. Language teachers often know that students need to put in the work outside of class but EFL teachers are not usually instructed on how they can help or what their role should be in this process. That is why it is so important that we take an in-depth look at the question, *how can teachers of English as a foreign language at the university level help their students become successful, autonomous learners?* The research presented here has shown that teachers play an essential role in this process and it is important that they understand what their role is. Not only that, but teachers should also have flexible options on how they can assist their students. It is essential that both teachers and students understand the goals of the students, and teachers may have to give explicit instruction on how to set goals that are measurable and attainable. The research

presented here provides an overview of how teachers can help their students and help them play an active role in the learning process.

Summary

The literature review presented above suggests that autonomous learning is essential in helping students learn a foreign language. There is much debate about the definition of autonomy but most agree that it has to do with a student's ability to learn on their own. This encompasses many things including: the ability to assess one's needs, set goals, plan how learning will happen and what resources will be used to aid in learning, and assessing learning outcomes, and making adjustments as necessary. Some students are naturally highly motivated and will undertake this on their own. Most students, however, seem to greatly benefit from guidance from a teacher.

The teacher plays many roles in helping their students to become successful, autonomous learners. The teacher must first teach students how to learn. They can do this by teaching them about the process of learning and the steps needed to learn on their own. It is also important that the teacher provides a rationale for autonomous learning and encouragement. Even though students should become sufficient in assessing their own work, many still benefit from individualized feedback from their teacher. There are many different activities available to teachers that allow them to give more autonomy to their students, including asking students to keep learning journals and portfolios. Showing students how to integrate technology into their learning outside of the classroom can also be useful. Finally, when available, self-access learning centers can be invaluable to helping students find the resources they need to be able to successfully learn on their

own.

       Chapter three provides details of the project informed by this research. The goal of the project is to create a professional development training to help university language teachers implement autonomous learning and aid their students in developing independent learning skills.

CHAPTER THREE

Project Description

Introduction

The purpose of the literature review in chapter two was to provide an overview of what past research has found regarding the necessity of fostering autonomous learning in students as well as methods that have been utilized and their effectiveness. The knowledge gained from chapter two was used to inform this capstone project and provide research-backed answers to my research question: *how can teachers of English as a foreign language at the university level help their students become successful, autonomous learners?* This chapter aims to describe the final project that was informed by that literature review and by additional theories related to best practices in adult learning and data collection methods.

This chapter begins with a description of the project. The project aims to be a series of professional development workshops for teachers and this chapter describes the nature of the project as well as how it is to be presented. The framework used to inform the project and creation of the evaluative survey is also discussed.

Within this section, the intended audience is also detailed. This gives the reader a clear idea of how what has been learned will be transmitted to others in the field in order to further their practice as a teacher. The rationale behind the chosen audience is also explained. Finally, there is an overview of how the effectiveness of the presentation will be measured. This includes an examination of best practices regarding both adult education and collecting data through surveys. A description of the survey questions and

the guidelines used to create the survey is discussed. This furthers the reasoning of why this type of project was chosen for this topic and how the outcomes and effectiveness of the project will be evaluated in a way that provides accurate and useful data.

The second section explains the timeline within which the project and capstone were completed. This chapter ends with a summary of chapter three and a brief preview of chapter four.

Project Description and Framework

This professional development training is envisioned to take place within four sessions. The lengths of these sessions will vary with the first session being the longest, perhaps around two hours. The three follow-up sessions will be slightly shorter in length, around one to one and a half hours. This length was chosen to allow for enough time to cover the material to be presented, as well as allow for thoughtful reflection on the part of the participants. The professional development will be presented through a slide show presentation (Appendix A). Google Slides was the chosen platform to host these slides due to its easy accessibility on any computer with an internet connection. The slides can also be downloaded to store on a USB drive for use if the internet is not available.

The first workshop will present the background and idea of autonomous learning and provide some strategies teachers can implement in their classrooms. The teachers will have a chance to think about what they want to try and will then meet in small groups to discuss what strategies they liked, what they didn't like, and what they plan to implement in their classrooms.

Prior to workshop two, a survey (Appendix D) will be sent out to teachers asking what is working and what is not, as well as any questions they have. The responses will be used to facilitate workshop two where the facilitator will address the questions submitted. Teachers will meet in their same groups to discuss how implementation is coming along in their classes. There will then be a full group discussion addressing the questions from surveys and any others that have come up. The facilitator will present a few new strategies based on feedback from participants. The facilitator will also provide the attendees with tools to evaluate the effectiveness of what they are doing, such as a survey to give their students. At the end of workshop two, the attendees will meet in their groups to discuss what they will do differently and any new strategies to try.

Workshop three follows a similar format to workshop two. A survey (Appendix E) will be sent out prior to see how the attendees are doing. In workshop three some strategies to implement what they have learned for the long-term will be including. This includes things such as suggestions to give their school about resources or materials they can create to introduce this concept to new students each year. If they haven't been already, the attendees should survey their students after workshop three (Appendix F). Their results will be discussed in workshop four.

Workshop four follows the same format as two and three. Results of student surveys will be discussed and attendees will get a chance to share their final thoughts. The idea is that workshop one is very facilitator centered while two-four will be more attendee centered.

Framework

Theories of adult learning were used to guide the creation and implementation of this project. Proven best practices of getting data from surveys will also be used. Knowles (1992) was used as a framework for the project. This framework was chosen to ensure that the presentation is interesting and impactful. Knowles' theory for teaching adults follows two general principles:

1. Learners should be active participants in their learning rather than receiving information passively.

2. Adult learning should start with the backgrounds, needs, interests, problems, and concerns of the participants and build upon them. (1992, p. 11-12).

Particularly when instructing large groups of adults, quantity and quality of interaction is important, Knowles (1992) stated. He outlined three different types of interaction and ways to improve these interactions.

The first type of interaction is "interaction on the platform" (Knowles, 1992, p.11). At a minimum, this requires a single speaker but can be enhanced by adding visual aids and additional speakers to create a more dynamic dialogue. For my presentation, I plan to have one presenter and a visual aid. Participants will also receive a handout summarizing the presentation on which they can take notes.

The second type of instruction is called "interaction between platform and audience" (Knowles, 1992, p.11). The most basic form of this interaction is inviting the audience to ask questions at the conclusion of the presentation. This is something that I plan to do. Knowles (1992) also suggested creating groups called the "reaction group"

and "watchdog group" (p. 11). The reaction team listens to the presentation and then gives its reactions. I would prefer to do this activity in small groups so that everyone has a chance to give their thoughts. At the conclusion of the presentation, I will ask people to meet in small groups to have a brief discussion on the presentation and how they plan to apply what they have learned. The "watchdog group" listens for terms or concepts it thinks the general audience may be unfamiliar with and will interrupt the presentation to ask for clarification (Knowles, 1992, p.11). This presentation is intended specifically for teachers so, in this case, this probably is not something I would utilize. However, if I happened to be presenting to a more diverse group or to a group of very new teachers, this could be useful.

The third and final interaction outlined by Knowles is "interaction among members of the audience" (1992, p.12). He stated that he often begins his presentations by getting a feel for the audience. I think this is very important because every group is different and how the information is presented should be adjusted to meet the needs of each group of students. I would start my presentation by getting a show of hands on different categories such as the age of students participants teach and the participants' background in education (e.g., do they have a TEFL certificate, BA in education, or MA).

Knowles (1992) also suggested having the participants form groups of two to six to have short discussions before and/or after the presentation. I think for my purposes I would generally start each presentation by having participants meet in groups to discuss some focus questions including: are your students learning the language for fun/personal fulfillment or as a requirement (for a job, degree, or living situation)? Do you feel that

your students rely on you as their primary source of information regarding learning their

target language? Do you think the majority of your students seek out additional learning

materials to enhance their language skills outside of what you have assigned? My hope is

that these questions will get the participants thinking about the content of the presentation

and their own teaching situation. At the conclusion of the presentation, Knowles (1992)

suggested having students get back into their groups to discuss how they plan to apply the

ideas from the presentation in their individual context. Each group then has one

representative summarize their ideas for the class. I plan to follow this suggestion in my

own presentation. This way, participants have a clear idea of what they are taking away

from the presentation without having to unpack it later.

Project Audience

The intended audience for this project is ESL/EFL teachers teaching adult

students in a university setting. Potentially, this topic could be applicable to language

teachers teaching any language at any age level, but the project is aimed specifically at

ESL/EFL teachers teaching adults. As this is a professional development project, I

foresee teachers accessing this training through teaching conferences and workshops.

This audience was chosen because, in most cases, students who are taking English

language classes in university are doing so either as a requirement or to further their

career. For this reason, it becomes very important that these students are able to learn

how to further their English on their own. Also, it is not often that EFL teachers have

access to in-depth professional development trainings in general so I think this audience

could especially benefit from this opportunity.

Learning a language is an immense undertaking and a teacher can only get a student so far. It is imperative that students have the knowledge to further their skills on their own while they are in university and when they are working in the real world. It may be helpful to students if they are able to identify what they need to learn and have knowledge of how to do so. Language learning is a lifelong journey and students may find that journey to be much easier and much more enjoyable if they are able to learn independently. These skills are also pertinent to other areas of study outside of language learning and it will be beneficial for students to have the skills to apply to all areas of their studies.

Measuring Effectiveness

A paper survey (Appendix G) will be distributed to participants at the end of the training. This survey asks questions about what they learned and what they found useful and what they found less useful. The *Teacher Professional Development Evaluation Guide* by M. B. Haslam (2010), was used to aid in creation of the survey to ensure that the survey provides useful data. The participants will be asked questions about the usefulness of the presentation and activities. They will be asked if they see themselves implementing what they learned with their own students and there will be an option to provide their email address for a follow-up questionnaire, which will be provided digitally.

If they agree to the follow-up, they will receive a follow-up email (Appendix G) approximately three to six months later, depending on the timing of the event. This email will include a link to a survey (Appendix G). The survey is digital to ease the collection

of data and housed on a free platform that does not require the teacher to create an account or sign in to anything. The six-month timeline should give teachers enough time to implement some of the tips they gleaned from the presentation and see if they are working for their students or not. Six months was also chosen to account for breaks in the school year where teachers were not teaching. This follow-up survey asks teachers basic non-identifying questions about their work environment and students (how many students, age of students, why students take the class). They will also be asked if they implemented what they learned in the classrooms. If not, why? If so, was it effective? How did it help students? In what ways did it not help? Is there something you would like to try differently in the future?

Timeline for Project Completion

The timeline for completion of this project is late spring through summer of 2020. The course where the capstone was completed took place during the summer semester of 2020. Chapter two of the capstone was drafted in winter 2020 and chapters one and three were drafted during the spring semester of 2020. The entire capstone and project was completed in August of 2020.

Conclusion

The purpose of this chapter was to explain the nature and purpose of the project informed by this capstone. The project is a professional development aimed at ESL/EFL teachers teaching adult students at the university level. This specific target audience was chosen because these students and teachers could benefit from this training, however, as mentioned, much of the information to be presented can be applicable to ESL/EFL

teachers teaching other age groups and language levels. The project is intended to be presented at workshops or conferences aimed at teachers and should be completed in one 120 minute session.

The design of the project was informed by research-backed theories related to adult learning. Using these theories as the backbone of the project ensures that it is both useful and effective. The outcomes and effectiveness of the training will be evaluated through the use of surveys. The surveys were carefully crafted using researched methods of data collection to ensure that the information collected from the surveys provides valid and reliable data. Chapter four concludes this capstone project. It provides a reflection of the information learned in the completion of this capstone.

CHAPTER FOUR

Reflection and Conclusion

Introduction

In this concluding chapter, I reflect on this capstone and project as a whole and revisit the question: *how can teachers of English as a foreign language at the university level help their students become successful, autonomous learners?* This chapter consists of four sections: key learnings from the project, revisiting the literature review, project implications and limitations, and future research and communication of results.

The key learnings from this project section takes an in-depth look at some of the problems with English foreign language (EFL) teacher training as a whole. It also discusses how my knowledge and view of autonomous learning has been expanded and how this project and capstone will benefit the profession.

In the second section, I revisit the literature review and its key findings. I discuss the studies that were most important to defining learner autonomy, describing the importance of autonomous learning, identifying the most important roles and traits of students and teachers, and framing implementation.

The third section discusses the implications of this capstone and project as well as the limitations. The final section of this chapter discusses where future research should go from here as well as how I plan to communicate these results.

Key Learnings from the Project

English Foreign Language Teacher Training

      Unlike licensed K-12 teachers in the United States, English foreign language (EFL) teachers often teach overseas and all have very different backgrounds and different training. Typically, K-12 teachers have a degree, either undergraduate or masters, in education and have all completed the same or similar exams to receive their license. The type of training and exams varies a bit depending on grade level and subject teachers wish to teach, but generally, they all have similar education based on state licensure requirements. Licensed teachers also must participate in continuing education in order to keep their license. The case of EFL teachers is very different. Where in the world a teacher wishes to teach English typically dictates the types of training necessary. In most cases, a TEFL, CELTA, or other English teaching certificate is necessary. These certificates can vary extensively in terms of how many hours are required for completion, cost, and whether or not there is a teaching practicum requirement. Often, a bachelor's degree in any subject is also required, but sometimes just the certificate is enough. If teachers wish to teach at the college or university level, they will often need a master's degree and sometimes the certificate too. Once a teacher has these basic requirements, they typically do not need any further education. Depending on the country a teacher is teaching in, there may be very few, if any, opportunities to attend conferences or workshops aimed at furthering the knowledge and skills of EFL teachers. This is one aspect I struggled with while creating my project. Outside of my TEFL certificate and master's degree, I have not encountered many other opportunities to further my teaching

abilities. I do happen to live in a country that holds annual conferences for EFL teachers, but even those trainings and workshops are typically no more than one-time, forty-five minute sessions. I have never attended, or even had the opportunity to attend, a workshop that was larger in scale and spanned days or weeks. These types of workshops are often more effective and useful to teachers than one-time workshops. I think if more of these types of opportunities were available to EFL teachers, it would vastly improve the quality of EFL teaching all over the world.

Autonomous Learning

I have long viewed autonomous learning to be an essential part of language learning. When I studied German in university, I quickly learned that if I wanted to really learn this language, I had to work just as hard outside of class as I did in class. Now that I am a language teacher, I wanted to learn more about this topic from the teaching side rather than the student side. In completing my capstone and project, I learned so much about the teacher's role in autonomous learning and how they can help their students essentially learn how to learn. As a student, I viewed autonomous learning as supplementing what I learned in class in my own time; however, I did not always find this easy to do. I would often just review what had been learned in class and seek out additional materials and explanations when there was something that I did not understand. I never thought about how the teacher can play a big role by helping students figure out what they want to learn and how to learn it. By integrating lessons on how to learn and helping students understand their goals, teachers can help all of their students, even those that are less intrinsically motivated, succeed.

Benefit to the Profession

I believe that many language teachers know that motivation to study outside of class is an important trait for students to possess if they want to learn effectively. However, I do not think many teachers receive any basic training or information on why they should explicitly bring autonomous learning into the classroom or how to do it. It is my hope that this capstone and project adds something to the conversation on independent learning. While completing my literature review, I came across many great articles and studies, but I did not find much all-inclusive information on why autonomous learning is important, how to introduce the idea to students, and different methods of implementation in the classroom. Every teacher, student, and classroom is unique, and there is no one right way for teachers to implement this kind of learning. With this project, my aim was to provide a workshop that gives teachers practical ideas for implementation as well as a space to share what worked and did not. So much of teaching is trial and error, so I wanted to provide a space where teachers could freely implement various techniques within their own classrooms and own situations and have options on how to remedy those techniques that did not provide the anticipated results.

In this section, I discussed the key insights I learned from the creation of this capstone and the project informed by it. My views on EFL teacher education and training compared to licensed teachers was discussed as well as the greater insights I gained into autonomous learning in general. I concluded with a discussion of how I hope this capstone and project adds to the conversation and provides a resource for teachers

wanting to know more about this topic. The next section revisits some important aspects of the literature review from chapter two.

Revisiting the Literature Review

The literature review was the most important aspect of this capstone because it directly informed the project. The sources that proved to be the most important were those that provided insight on the definitions of autonomous learning and independent learning, discussed why autonomous learning is important, explained the necessary traits of students and teachers, and those that considered different methods of implementation in the classroom.

Definitions

There are many different definitions of autonomous learning. Little (2007) gave a general definition of autonomy in education as a process where the teacher gradually gives more independence to their students in a systematic fashion. This definition was important to address because it defines learner autonomy from the teacher's role and perspective. On the other hand, Holec (1981) defined learner autonomy as, "the ability to take charge of one's own learning" (p.3). This definition provides an insight into what exactly the student's role is in autonomous learning. Holec's (1981) definition is the one used in this capstone. Also notable is that the terms *autonomy* and *autonomous learning* are not typically considered by most researchers to have the same meaning as *self-instruction, self-access, self-study, self-education, out-of-class learning,* or *distance learning* (Joshi, 2011). These studies helped to provide the definitions necessary to frame my capstone and project and help the audience understand the terms used within.

Why Autonomous Learning is Important

Before best practices in implementing autonomous learning could be explored, it was first important to establish why autonomous learning is important. According to Kormos and Csizér (2013), students living in a country where their target language is not spoken by the majority will often struggle to learn a language solely from classroom instruction. It often is not possible for classroom learning to provide enough opportunities for interaction and language use. For this reason, it is essential that students take advantage of outside learning opportunities or understand how to create them on their own. Orawiwatnakul and Wichadee (2017) contribute to this discussion by adding that when students engage in learning outside of the classroom, they bring back additional knowledge to make the classroom environment more interesting and engaging. All of these points were included in the capstone project because it cannot be assumed that all teachers automatically understand why autonomous learning is so important both to their teaching and to their student's learning.

Necessary Roles and Traits of Students and Teachers

Before teachers can implement independent learning in their classrooms, they must first understand the roles they play in the autonomous classroom. One point echoed by most studies that discuss this topic is that autonomous learning does not remove the teacher from the learning process. Joshi (2011) laid out four roles the teacher must play: facilitator, organizer, resource, provider of feedback. These roles are similar to the roles a teacher plays in any classroom so it is also important to understand what the student needs to add to this equation. Chan (2001) specified several traits or abilities that students

need to be effective independent learners. These abilities included: setting learning goals, developing learning strategies, creating study plans, self-reflection, identifying and selecting resources, and assessing one's own progress. Teachers must consider these abilities required of their students when they examine how to carry out the four roles they must take on to help their students succeed.

Implementation

One study was particularly important in informing this section of the literature review and also the project. Reinders (2010) created a general framework for the implementation of autonomous learning in any classroom. This framework consisted of four steps:

1. Identifying individual student needs

2. Goal setting

3. Planning

4. Selecting resources and learning strategies

This framework is provided in the first workshop of the teacher development training informed by this capstone. Teachers are expected to use this framework as an aid to develop a plan for fostering autonomous learning in their own classroom based on their own unique situation.

The literature review played a key role in the formation of this capstone and project. It provided a framework upon which to build the presentation for the final project with ideas and suggestions backed by research. The next section discusses the implications and limitations of the project.

Project Limitations and Implications

Project Limitations

This project is a professional development program for EFL teachers consisting of four separate workshops. As mentioned previously, the amount and type of training that EFL teachers have varies greatly. EFL teachers often teach abroad in countries where English is not a language predominantly spoken by the local population. These teachers are not typically required to attend any sort of continuing education or professional development. In fact, because many of these teachers did not go to university for teaching, many do not plan to teach abroad long-term and will often return to their home country to pursue a teaching license, higher education that may or may not be teaching related, or work in a completely different field. I think this is one of the reasons that many EFL teachers find that there are not a lot of professional development options open to them. A major limitation of this project is that there are often very few venues available for this type of in-depth, long-term training. This training is designed to be applicable to EFL teachers teaching in any country, but it could prove to be very difficult to find the appropriate avenues to implement this training or any type of professional development that consists of more than a single session.

Project Implications

Considering the limitations of this project, we see that there are, perhaps, some policy implications to consider. EFL teachers are often scattered throughout the world, and each country has its own ideas of what it wants from these teachers. Therefore, I think a good first step would be to integrate the ideas from this proposed professional

development into certification and graduate programs aimed at EFL teachers. An introduction to student autonomy and its implementation could be especially beneficial to those teachers seeking advanced education in English language teaching because they often already have experience teaching and are typically the ones who will be seeking jobs teaching at the college and university level.

Future Research and Communication of Results

Future Research

Thus far there has been a lot of research and some studies done on this topic, but I think more is still needed. In the future, more research could be done on which methods of implementation are most effective in different settings. I found quite a bit of research on larger-scale methods of implementation such as resource centers, but not as much research on the more small-scale methods that can be carried out in the classroom without a lot of added expense to the teacher or school. The effectiveness of study plans aimed at facilitating independent learning and the effectiveness of resources based on their type and ease of access are two small-scale pieces of implementation that could be studied further. Also, research on how teachers can best help their students create an effective learning plan could also be beneficial.

Another area of potential future research is helping online students become autonomous learners. As teaching and learning in entirely online settings becomes more common, it is important that teachers know how to help their students become independent learners in the physical classroom as well as the virtual classroom. It would be interesting to see the similarities and differences in proper implementation between

in-person and online education. I would also be interested in a study to find out if students who choose to pursue their education online rather than in-person are more confident and skilled in autonomous learning compared to their peers who prefer their education to be in-person.

Communication of Results

As a teacher myself, the primary way I intend to use the information I have learned from the capstone and project will be by executing it with my own students. Currently, I teach at the elementary level, but I am hoping to teach university-level students in the future. This project was aimed at university-level students, but I think many of the same concepts and principles will be applicable at the elementary level as well. As I carry out what I have learned in my own classroom, I will be able to learn from my own successes and failures to improve this workshop. As I have stated, it is difficult to find avenues in which to present training to EFL teachers that is more in-depth than a one-time training. I am hoping to take what I have learned from my research, and also what I learn from my own experiences in the classroom, and be able to create smaller-scale workshops as well that can be presented at teaching conferences.

Summary

In chapter four, I reevaluated this project and capstone as a whole and what has been gained from it. We have seen the shortfalls in current teacher training practices in terms of English foreign language teachers and why more training like this is necessary. We have also revisited the literature and discussed which studies were most essential in informing this capstone and project. The limitations and implications of this project were

discussed, many of which went back to the lack of intensive training opportunities for EFL teachers. Finally, the need for further research in effective implementation and the application of autonomous learning to online education could be beneficial to the field. Let us revisit the question, *how can teachers of English as a foreign language at the university level help their students become successful, autonomous learners?* It is imperative that teachers understand the role they must play and instruct their students in understanding their own roles. However, even when given a basic framework of how to implement autonomous learning in the classroom, it is important that teachers also understand their students and their unique situation. Research can only provide guidelines, but teachers need to be able to take these guidelines and adjust them to work for themselves and their students. Teachers must be willing to go through a process of trial and error to find what methods work best for them and their students. EFL teachers teach in widely varying contexts, so teachers must be able to discern what methods will and will not work for them.

Conclusion

It is my hope that this project starts a conversation in the English foreign language teaching community about how we can foster autonomous learning in our students. Implementing this in the classroom is not a black and white process, and teachers and their students will have to make the effort in order for this to be effective. If teachers and students can work together to choose the methods and resources that work best for them, it will improve everyone's experience. Of course, it will also help students become successful in the language learning endeavor which should always be the primary goal.

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APPENDIX A

Workshops 1-4 Slides

Welcome!

Overview:

Icebreaking

Definitions

Importance of autonomous learning

Role of teachers and students

Implementation

Icebreaking

Please get into small groups to introduce yourselves and answer the following questions:

1. Discuss the terms 'autonomous' and 'independent learning'
2. Are your students learning the language for fun/personal fulfillment or as a requirement (for a job, degree, or living situation)?
3. Do you feel that your students rely on you as their primary source of information regarding learning their target language?
4. Do you think the majority of your students seek out additional learning materials to enhance their language skills outside of what you have assigned?
5. What do you hope to learn? Do you have any questions before we get started?

What is autonomy?

- Autonomy is a process where the teacher gradually gives more independence to their students in a systematic fashion (Little, 2007).

Definitions

- *Autonomy, autonomous learning ≠ self-instruction, self-access, self-study, self-education, out-of-class learning, distance learning.* (Joshi, 2011).
  - These terms are related to ways students can learn on their own
  - Autonomy is more a student's ability to learn on their own.

Definitions

- Generally, *learner independence, self-direction, independent learning* are considered to be the same as *autonomous learning.*
- Autonomous learning does not mean learning alone.

Definitions

- Most researchers use the definition put forth by Holec, 1981: "The ability to take charge of one's own learning" (p.3).

- In this workshop, Holec's definition will be used and the terms *independent learning* and *autonomous learning* will be used interchangeably.

Why autonomous learning is important?

- Students living in a country where their target language is not spoken by the majority will really struggle to learn a language solely in the classroom.
- Not possible for classroom learning to provide enough opportunities for for interaction and language use.
- Important that students take advantage of outside learning opportunities or create them. (Kormos and Csizér, 2013)

Why autonomous learning is important?

- When students engage in learning outside of the classroom, they bring back additional knowledge. (Orawiwatnakul and Wichadee, 2017).

- It is important that students have some say in the learning process (such as objectives or goals)
  - This can help students realize things they would like to learn but may need to see additional resources outside of the classroom to do so.

Why you may need to convince students it is important

- May face some resistance from students if autonomous learning is new concept for them.
- Studies from universities in Turkey (Bekleyen and Selimoğlu, 2016) and Hong Kong (Chan, 2001) both found that students view the teacher as the facilitator of the course and the course planner.
- Find out your student's perspectives and thoughts on autonomous learning.

Teacher's roles

- Autonomous learning ≠ removing teacher entirely
- Teachers must encourage autonomy among their students
- Teacher support and learning community involvement still essential.
- Teachers must act as (Joshi, 2011):
  - Facilitator
  - Organizer
  - Resource
  - Provider of feedback

Helping students become autonomous

- Some students will need more support than others.
- Learners must be explicitly taught how to learn and how to choose learning materials.
  - Access to additional resources alone is not sufficient (Reinders, 2010)
- Teachers must help create goals, understand different strategies for learning, and help them locate resources.
  - Teachers should provide an orientation to autonomous learning and goal setting.
- Provide opportunities for students to work together to discuss study methods and resources that work or do not work for them.

Necessary traits of autonomous learners

Chan (2001) laid out 6 abilities needed for autonomous learning:

1. Ability to set learning goals
2. Ability to develop learning strategies
3. Ability to create study plans
4. Self-reflection
5. Ability to identify and select resources
6. Ability to assess one's own progress.

   Take a minute to discuss with your group what you believe is the teacher's role in helping students gain these abilities.

Implementation

- Not a black and white process.
- Many different methods are available and the method you choose depends on many things such as:
  - The wants and needs of your students
  - The technology and resources available to you and your students.
- Students play an active role in their learning --> teacher gradually steps away --> students take control over learning process. (Orawiwatnakul & Wichadee, 2017)

Implementation

- Most research shows students need a <u>study plan</u> to guide their learning and help them reach their goals.
  - Students must regularly review their study plan. (Marsh, 2012).

Implementation

Reinders (2010) gave a general framework for implementation:

1. Students should identify their needs
2. Goal setting
3. Planning
4. Select resources and learning strategies

This plan should be regularly revisited and revised when needed.

Implementation

Students should identify their needs

- Students should identify their strengths and weaknesses
- Students should identify what they want to work on

Can also be teacher-led through placement tests to help students identify their strengths and weaknesses.

Implementation

Goal setting - SMART Goals

- **S**pecific (simple, sensible, significant).
- **M**easurable (meaningful, motivating).
- **A**chievable (agreed, attainable).
- **R**elevant (reasonable, realistic and resourced, results-based).
- **T**ime bound (time-based, time limited, time/cost limited, timely, time-sensitive).

https://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/smart-goals.htm

Implementation

<table>
<tr><td>**SMART Goals**</td></tr>
<tr><td>**S**pecific</td></tr>
<tr><td>**M**easurable</td></tr>
<tr><td>**A**chievable</td></tr>
<tr><td>**R**elevant</td></tr>
<tr><td>**T**ime bound</td></tr>
</table>

Goal Example 1: I want to improve my writing skills.

Goal Example 2: I want to improve my writing skills by keeping a journal where I write in English every day, trying to make each entry longer than the last, through the end of the semester.

Goal Example 3: I want to improve my ability to discuss politics in English by learning 5 new words on the subject each day and practicing my speaking daily in order to have a 20 minute conversation by the end of the semester.

Implementation

Planning

- Students should create a learning plan.
- Their learning plan should outline how they will improve upon their identified weaknesses and how they will meet their goals.

Implementation

<u>Select resources and learning strategies</u>

- Part of the study plan
- Teacher should give instruction on how to select resources and on different learning strategies.
- Helpful if teacher can provide a list of resources (books, websites, technology, etc.)

Implementation – Integrating Technology

- Any technology introduced or used in the classroom must be a normalized technology.
- Many students utilize smartphones for learning:
    - Photograph in-class board work
    - Recording lectures
    - Flash card apps
    - Voice recognition technology
    - Apps for authentic materials (news) Barrs (2011)

Implementation - Flash card apps

Here are three examples of flash card apps:

- ○ Memrise - premade decks
- ○ Quizlet - Teachers can make decks for students to use
- ○ Anki - best for spaced repetition

Implementation: learning journals/portfolios

- Can be used in a variety of ways.
- Students should reflect on their learning
- Record methods they are using and how effective they are.
- Teachers should provide personalized feedback to teach student (Du, 2012)

Conclusion

Get back into groups

- What was your favorite strategy? What do you think was not so helpful?
- What do you plan to try in your own classroom?
- Are there any potential problems you anticipate?

Next workshop information

A survey will be sent prior to workshop 2. Please respond to it as soon as possible. Also, please make sure the presenter has your email address before leaving today's session.

{Workshop 2 date, time, location here}

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Fostering Autonomous Learning

Workshop 2

Welcome!

- Icebreaking
- Questions
- Activity Ideas
- Group discussion

Icebreaking

- Return to your group from the last session.
- Reintroduce yourself
- Each person should share:
  - Strategies tried
  - What successes did you have?
  - What failures did you encounter?

Questions from the surveys

{Here, the facilitator should customize this slide based on questions and concerns brought up during the follow-up survey to workshop 1. Included here are examples but again this should be customized.}

1. Are there any special activities that can be included in the classroom to further aid my students in this autonomous learning journey?
2. What can I do about students who really do not want to put in the effort outside of class?
3. How can I help students who have strayed from their learning plan?

Activity Ideas: Group work and Projects

- Allow groups to choose their own activity and desired outcome of the group work (Little, 2007).
  - Group projects can make students accountable to their peers instead of their teacher which can also help foster autonomy (Marsh, 2012).

Activity Ideas: Writing

- Allow students to make posters summarizing their learning plans, or listing useful vocabulary, idioms, and grammar.
- Students can also be asked to keep learning journals.
  - It is important to give students some freedom as to what to include in their journals. There are many options including recording new grammar with example sentences or more advanced types of writings like stories or summaries (Little, 2007).

Activity Ideas: Writing

- Giving students space to write collaboratively can also improve autonomous learning skills.
  - Students can create and share blogs where they can comment on each other's writing and provide feedback.
  - Utilize class wiki sites where all of the students contribute one piece of a bigger project (Warschauer and Liaw, 2011).

Activity Ideas: Listening and Speaking

- Listening activities are one of the most common for students to do outside of the classroom (Bekleyen and Selimoğlu, 2016). Most common were:
  - listening to English songs
  - watching English movies or TV shows.
- Podcasts can also be used for listening and speaking practice.
  - Students can create them to share with classmates
  - Can serve as audio diary to hear improvement in their speaking over time (Warschauer & Liaw, 2011).

Groups

- Return to your groups

- Take a moment to discuss the activities we just went over.
    - What did you like? What didn't you like?
    - What would you like to try.
    - Do you have any other ideas for group work/projects, writing, listening, or speaking activities to promote autonomy?

Next Workshop Information

A survey will again be sent out following this workshop. Please respond as soon as you are able to so that any questions can be discussed in workshop 3.

{Workshop 3 date, time, location here}

Sources

Bekleyen, N., & Selimoğlu, F. (2016). Learner behaviors and perceptions of autonomous language learning. *The Electronic Journal for English as a Foreign Language, 20*(3). Retrieved from https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1122803

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Fostering Autonomous Learning

Workshop 3

Welcome!

- Icebreaking
- Questions
- Long-term implementation
- Self-access centers
- Surveying students
- Group work

Icebreaking

- Return to your group
- Each person should share:
  - Strategies tried
  - What successes did you have?
  - What failures did you encounter?

Questions from the Surveys

{Here, the facilitator should customize this slide based on questions and concerns brought up during the follow-up survey to workshop 2. Included here are examples but again this should be customized.}

1. How can I find evidence that what I am doing is working?
2. What are some more activity ideas for in and out of the classroom?
3. How can I fit these ideas into an established curriculum?

Long-term Implementation

- In workshop 1 we discussed a basic framework for implementation (Reinders, 2010):
  - Students should identify their needs
  - Goal setting
  - Planning
  - Select resources and learning strategies
- It may be helpful for you as a teacher to come up with a plan on how you will implement this with each new class at the beginning of the semester.
- Handouts, a presentation

Long-term Implementation

- Think about what additional resources are available to your students.
- Is there a library or a place where students can find books both for learning and for pleasure reading the target language?

Self-Access Centers

- Self-Access Center: A space for students to study and find resources
- Students can utilize space to work together, practice their language, find teacher-selected resources that may be useful to them while learning on their own.
- Does anything like this exist in your school?
- Reinders (2006) found that students used SACs often and found them useful when they were comfortable with autonomous learning.

Surveying Students

- Simple language so that students understand the questions.
- Ensure that surveys remain anonymous so that you get the best results.
- Please give a copy of the paper survey you have been given to your students and compile the results before workshop 4. You will share your results with your small group.
- Survey was created at https://www.freequestionnairemaker.com/

Groups

- What steps do you plan to take to implement autonomous learning with new classes?
- How are your steps similar or different to what you did this time.
- Any other questions or concerns you would like to address with your group.

Next Workshop Information

Please remember to survey your students and bring the results to the next, and final, workshop.

{Workshop 4 date, time, location here}

Sources

Reinders, H. (2006). Supporting self-directed learning through an electronic learning environment. *Supporting Independent Learning: Issues and Interventions.* 219-238. Retrieved from https://innovationinteaching.org/docs/article-2006-independent-learning-book.pdf

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Fostering Autonomous Learning

Workshop 4

Welcome!

- Icebreaking
- Group discussion
- Additional Resources
- Follow-up Survey
- Final Questions

Icebreaking

- Return to your group
- Each person should share:
  - Strategies/plans implemented for long-term implementation (discussed in workshop 3).
  - What successes did you have?
  - What failures did you encounter?
  - Any questions for your small group or whole group?

Groups

- In your group, please discuss your findings from the surveys of your students.
- Were you surprised by the findings?
- What is working? What is not working?
- How can you improve the experience of your students?
- Any questions, comments, concerns you would like to address with your small group or the whole group?

Where to from here?

- Continue your implementation and continuously learn and grow from the experience.
- Seek out additional resources:
    - Check the sources cited in presentations from workshops 1-3
    - www.teachenglish.org.uk/autonomy
        - This is from the British Council.
    - https://www.apa.org/education/k12/learners
        - This cite provides a great overview as well as links to additional information such as books on the subject.

Follow-up Survey

Please be on the lookout for a follow-up survey to this professional development. It will be sent via the e-mail you provided.

Any final questions?

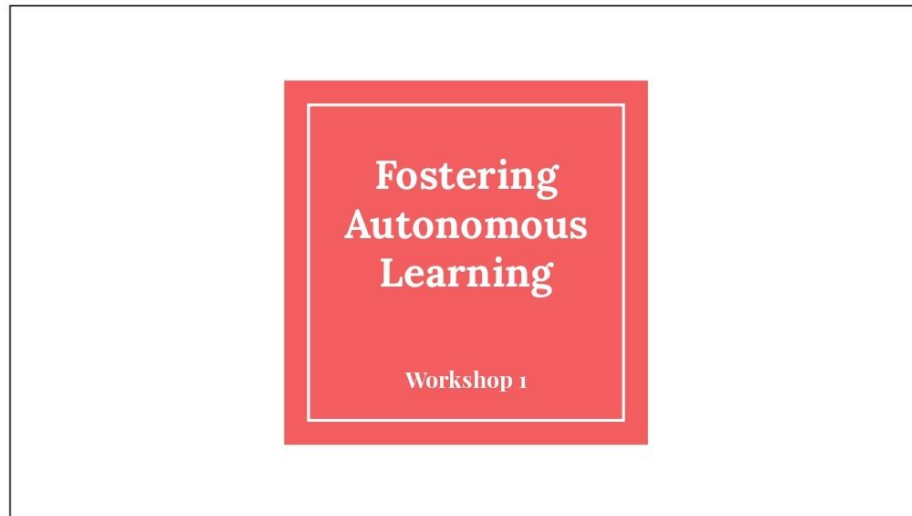
Thank you!

APPENDIX B

Workshops 1-4 Script

Welcome!

<u>Overview:</u>

Icebreaking

Definitions

Importance of autonomous learning

Role of teachers and students

Implementation

Welcome the class. Facilitator should give a brief introduction about themselves (education, background, interest in the topic) and give overview of today's workshop.

Icebreaking

Please get into small groups to introduce yourselves and answer the following questions:

1. Discuss the terms 'autonomous' and 'independent learning'
2. Are your students learning the language for fun/personal fulfillment or as a requirement (for a job, degree, or living situation)?
3. Do you feel that your students rely on you as their primary source of information regarding learning their target language?
4. Do you think the majority of your students seek out additional learning materials to enhance their language skills outside of what you have assigned?
5. What do you hope to learn? Do you have any questions before we get started?

Break people up into small groups of 3-4 people. Ask them to discuss these 5 questions in their small group. Come back as a whole group and have volunteers answer these questions. Try to get at least 1 volunteer per group to answer so that you can get a feel for what the class currently knows and believes.

What is autonomy?

- Autonomy is a process where the teacher gradually gives more independence to their students in a systematic fashion (Little, 2007).

There are many definitions as we will see next, but I think this gives a good, general description of what we will be talking about.

Definitions

- *Autonomy, autonomous learning ≠ self-instruction, self-access, self-study, self-education, out-of-class learning, distance learning.* (Joshi, 2011).
  - These terms are related to ways students can learn on their own
  - Autonomy is more a student's ability to learn on their own.

Autonomy and autonomous learning do not typically mean the same thing as self-instruction, self-access, self-study, self-education, out-of-class learning, and distance learning.

Most of the literature does not consider autonomous learning to mean learning alone. Rather, it is more about the **capacity** to learn independently and the ability to **manage** one's own learning.

Definitions

- Generally, *learner independence, self-direction, independent learning* are considered to be the same as *autonomous learning.*
- Autonomous learning does not mean learning alone.

Learner independence, self-direction, and independent learning are all considered to have the same meaning as autonomous learning.

Again, even though the terms "independence" and "autonomy" are stressed here, it does not, in fact mean the student learns alone, more they have the capability to teach themselves.

Definitions

- Most researchers use the definition put forth by Holec, 1981: "The ability to take charge of one's own learning" (p.3).

- In this workshop, Holec's definition will be used and the terms *independent learning* and *autonomous learning* will be used interchangeably.

Why autonomous learning is important?

- Students living in a country where their target language is not spoken by the majority will really struggle to learn a language solely in the classroom.
- Not possible for classroom learning to provide enough opportunities for for interaction and language use.
- Important that students take advantage of outside learning opportunities or create them. (Kormos and Csizér, 2013)

We only have so much time in the classroom. As is true of all subjects, it is not possible to meet the needs and goals of each student soley in the amount of time they spend in the classroom.

This is why it is essential that students are able to learn effectively on their own outside of the classroom. Especially in a subject such as language learning that is so broad.

In subjects like mathematics, you may specialize in one type of mathematics such as statistics. In language learning, it is possible that some students simply want to know enough of the language to pass a test. Others may want to be fluent in all areas including: reading, writing, listening, and speaking.

How can we cater to both kinds of students? How can we cater to students whose strengths and weaknesses in the language are different?

Why autonomous learning is important?

- When students engage in learning outside of the classroom, they bring back additional knowledge. (Orawiwatnakul and Wichadee, 2017).

- It is important that students have some say in the learning process (such as objectives or goals)
  - This can help students realize things they would like to learn but may need to see additional resources outside of the classroom to do so.

When students engage in learning outside of the classroom, they bring back additional knowledge to make the classroom environment more interesting and engaging.

Why you may need to convince students it is important

- May face some resistance from students if autonomous learning is new concept for them.
- Studies from universities in Turkey (Bekleyen and Selimoğlu, 2016) and Hong Kong (Chan, 2001) both found that students view the teacher as the facilitator of the course and the course planner.
- Find out your student's perspectives and thoughts on autonomous learning.

1. May face some resistance from students if learning outside the classroom and prescribed syllabus is a new concepts for them.

3. It is important that you find out your student's perspectives and thoughts on autonomous learning before implementing it so that you can find the best way to ease your students into it if need be.

Teacher's roles

- Autonomous learning ≠ removing teacher entirely
- Teachers must encourage autonomy among their students
- Teacher support and learning community involvement still essential.
- Teachers must act as (Joshi, 2011):
  - Facilitator
  - Organizer
  - Resource
  - Provider of feedback

Many wrongly think that autonomous learning means removing the teacher entirely but this is not true. Teacher support and access to other learners is still essential.

Helping students become autonomous

- Some students will need more support than others.
- Learners must be explicitly taught how to learn and how to choose learning materials.
    - Access to additional resources alone is not sufficient (Reinders, 2010)
- Teachers must help create goals, understand different strategies for learning, and help them locate resources.
    - Teachers should provide an orientation to autonomous learning and goal setting.
- Provide opportunities for students to work together to discuss study methods and resources that work or do not work for them.

2. Learners must be explicitly taught how to learn on their own and how to choose learning materials that will suit their learning and goals.

4. Teachers should also provide opportunities for students to work together to discuss study methods and resources that work or do not work for them.

Necessary traits of autonomous learners

Chan (2001) laid out 6 abilities needed for autonomous learning:

1. Ability to set learning goals
2. Ability to develop learning strategies
3. Ability to create study plans
4. Self-reflection
5. Ability to identify and select resources
6. Ability to assess one's own progress.

Take a minute to discuss with your group what you believe is the teacher's role in helping students gain these abilities.

After the groups have discussed have a few volunteers share what their group thought with the class.

Implementation

- Not a black and white process.
- Many different methods are available and the method you choose depends on many things such as:
  - The wants and needs of your students
  - The technology and resources available to you and your students.
- Students play an active role in their learning --> teacher gradually steps away --> students take control over learning process. (Orawiwatnakul & Wichadee, 2017)

Students should be led to play an active role in their learning while the teacher gradually steps away and lets the students take control over their learning process.

Implementation

- Most research shows students need a <u>study plan</u> to guide their learning and help them reach their goals.
  - Students must regularly review their study plan. (Marsh, 2012).

We will discuss more about study plans in a few slides but I wanted to include this here because, if you do nothing else, helping your students to develop a study plan is one of the key aspects of helping them to become effective independent learners.

Implementation

Reinders (2010) gave a general framework for implementation:

1. Students should identify their needs
2. Goal setting
3. Planning
4. Select resources and learning strategies

This plan should be regularly revisited and revised when needed.

We are going to go more in-depth into each of these areas but here is a brief overview.

Implementation

Students should identify their needs

- ○ Students should identify their strengths and weaknesses
- ○ Students should identify what they want to work on

Can also be teacher-led through placement tests to help students identify their strengths and weaknesses.

Often students are very unaware of the learning needs and their strengths and weaknesses. Teachers can help by making an extensive needs analysis a key part of the class in the first weeks. Classroom activities should be linked to the identified needs and students should reflect on their success in relation to their needs. It is important here that progress by measured and reviewed regularly. This can be done through written portfolios, diaries, recorded podcasts, etc.

Teachers can test students on their reading, writing, speaking, and listening to help Ss assess their strengths and weaknesses but this isn't always do-able. Students often know what areas they need to work on.

Implementation

Goal setting - SMART Goals

- **S**pecific (simple, sensible, significant).
- **M**easurable (meaningful, motivating).
- **A**chievable (agreed, attainable).
- **R**elevant (reasonable, realistic and resourced, results-based).
- **T**ime bound (time-based, time limited, time/cost limited, timely, time-sensitive).

https://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/smart-goals.htm

Teachers should give explicit instruction on goal setting to assist students. Provide examples of a good goals and bad goals. Using the idea of SMART goals can be helpful.

Implementation

Goal Example 1: I want to improve my writing skills.

Goal Example 2: I want to improve my writing skills by keeping a journal where I write in English every day, trying to make each entry longer than the last, through the end of the semester.

Goal Example 3: I want to improve my ability to discuss politics in English by learning 5 new words on the subject each day and practicing my speaking daily in order to have a 20 minute conversation by the end of the semester.

Discuss each example goal and the following questions as a whole class.

What are the strengths and weaknesses of each goal?
Which elements of SMART goals does each one follow?

Implementation

Planning

- Students should create a learning plan.
- Their learning plan should outline how they will improve upon their identified weaknesses and how they will meet their goals.

Teachers should aim to allow learners to choose the what, when and how of their actions over time.

Teachers could give choices on the type of activity students want to complete using the same set of materials or language content.

Also, maybe activities do not have to be completed in a fixed order. Teachers should be willing to allow flexibility in the syllabus based on the wants and needs of the students.

Students should also include the resources they will use (more on next slide)

Implementation

Select resources and learning strategies

- Part of the study plan
- Teacher should give instruction on how to select resources and on different learning strategies.
- Helpful if teacher can provide a list of resources (books, websites, technology, etc.)

It is important to instruct on basic learning strategies as many students seem to struggle with this aspect.

Try to provide a list of helpful resources to your students, perhaps these are accessible for free online or in your school's library.

It is important that any resources you recommend are appropriate for autonomous learning. For example, if there are exercises, an answer key should also be included.

Implementation – Integrating Technology

- Any technology introduced or used in the classroom must be a normalized technology.
- Many students utilize smartphones for learning:
    - Photograph in-class board work
    - Recording lectures
    - Flash card apps
    - Voice recognition technology
    - Apps for authentic materials (news) Barrs (2011)

Many students are likely already using technology, especially smartphones or computers, to aid their learning in some ways, but it can be helpful to point out different ways these technologies can be used.

Implementation – Flash card apps

Here are three examples of flash card apps:

- ○ Memrise - premade decks
- ○ Quizlet - Teachers can make decks for students to use
- ○ Anki - best for spaced repetition

Here are 3 example of useful flashcard apps. All three are also have web versions that can be accessed via computer.

Memrise often has many pre-made decks that cover the vocabulary from popular language learning textbooks.

Quizlet allows decks to be shared between Ss and T.

Anki is known for being very effective as it utilizes spaced repitition which helps information go into long-term memory.

Implementation: learning journals/portfolios

- Can be used in a variety of ways.
- Students should reflect on their learning
- Record methods they are using and how effective they are.
- Teachers should provide personalized feedback to teach student (Du, 2012)

Asking students to keep a learning journal or portfolio of their activities is another useful task. These can be used for students to simply record the methods they are trying and how effectively they are or they can use it as a record of learning. Perhaps writing a journal entry each week and trying to increase the length of each entry. These journals could also be voice recordings for students who especially want to focus on their speaking abilities.

One study that worked with learning journals did find that students liked personalized feedback and felt they got more use out of their learning journals than they did when given more generalized feedback.

Conclusion

Get back into groups

- What was your favorite strategy? What do you think was not so helpful?
- What do you plan to try in your own classroom?
- Are there any potential problems you anticipate?

Have students get back into groups. After they have finished discussing, have each group share their thoughts.

Next workshop information

A survey will be sent prior to workshop 2. Please respond to it as soon as possible. Also, please make sure the presenter has your email address before leaving today's session.

{Workshop 2 date, time, location here}

Sources

Bekleyen, N., & Selimoğlu, F. (2016). Learner behaviors and perceptions of autonomous language learning. *The Electronic Journal for English as a Foreign Language, 20*(3). Retrieved from https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1122803

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Kormos, J., & Csizér, K. (2013). The interaction of motivation, self-regulatory strategies, and autonomous learning behavior in different learner groups. *TESOL Quarterly, 48*(2), 275–299. https://doi.org/10.1002/tesq.129

Little, D. (2007). Language learner autonomy: Some fundamentals revisited. *Innovation in Language Learning and Teaching, 1*(1), 14–29. https://doi.org/10.2167/illt040.0

Orawiwatnakul, W., & Wichadee, S. (2017). An investigation of undergraduate students' beliefs about autonomous language learning. *International Journal of Instruction*, 10(1), 117–132. Retrieved from https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1125143

Reinders, H. (2010). Towards a classroom pedagogy for learner autonomy: A framework of independent language learning skills. *Australian Journal of Teacher Education* (Online), 35(5), 40-55. Retrieved from https://ro.ecu.edu.au/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1454&context=ajte

The Mind Tools Content Team. SMART Goals: – How to Make Your Goals Achievable. Retrieved July 21, 2020, from https://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/smart-goals.htm

Fostering Autonomous Learning

Workshop 2

Welcome!

- Icebreaking
- Questions
- Activity Ideas
- Group discussion

Welcome the group back and provide a brief overview of today's workshop

Icebreaking

- Return to your group from the last session.
- Reintroduce yourself
- Each person should share:
    - Strategies tried
    - What successes did you have?
    - What failures did you encounter?

Have students return to their groups and discuss how their implementation has been going in their classrooms. Have volunteers share after groups are done discussing.

Questions from the surveys

{Here, the facilitator should customize this slide based on questions and concerns brought up during the follow-up survey to workshop 1. Included here are examples but again this should be customized.}

1. Are there any special activities that can be included in the classroom to further aid my students in this autonomous learning journey?
2. What can I do about students who really do not want to put in the effort outside of class?
3. How can I help students who have strayed from their learning plan?

Be sure to customize this slide. Keep the conversation open. The facilitator should offer ideas and strategies but also open it up to the group to get ideas and solutions. The facilitator could have the groups talk through some questions to come up with strategies together.

Activity Ideas: Group work and Projects

- Allow groups to choose their own activity and desired outcome of the group work (Little, 2007).
  - Group projects can make students accountable to their peers instead of their teacher which can also help foster autonomy (Marsh, 2012).

Now that you have the knowledge of the basics of implementing autonomous learning in the classroom, I wanted to give you a few more ideas of activities that you can have students do both in and out of class to foster independence and help them have a larger say in what they learn.

Group work and projects are effective, especially when students are allowed to choose their own activity and/or the desired outcome of their project.

Activity Ideas: Writing

- Allow students to make posters summarizing their learning plans, or listing useful vocabulary, idioms, and grammar.
- Students can also be asked to keep learning journals.
  - It is important to give students some freedom as to what to include in their journals. There are many options including recording new grammar with example sentences or more advanced types of writings like stories or summaries (Little, 2007).

Individual and group writing activities are also great. Having them create posters or cards that they can stick to their notebook or planner can be a useful way to help them remember their goals or have little cheat sheets of language aspects that are difficult for them.

As we discussed in the last workshop, learning journals can also be useful.

Activity Ideas: Writing

- Giving students space to write collaboratively can also improve autonomous learning skills.
  - Students can create and share blogs where they can comment on each other's writing and provide feedback.
  - Utilize class wiki sites where all of the students contribute one piece of a bigger project (Warschauer and Liaw, 2011).

<mark>Activity Ideas: Listening and Speaking</mark>

- Listening activities are one of the most common for students to do outside of the classroom (Bekleyen and Selimoğlu, 2016). Most common were:
  - listening to English songs
  - watching English movies or TV shows.
- Podcasts can also be used for listening and speaking practice.
  - Students can create them to share with classmates
  - Can serve as audio diary to hear improvement in their speaking over time (Warschauer & Liaw, 2011).

Listening is often a very important skill for students to practice autonomously. They get some listening practice in the classroom but, especially if they live in a country where their target language is not widely spoken, their opportunities to practice listening in the target language are very limited unless they find outside resources (Kemp, 2009).

Groups

- Return to your groups
- Take a moment to discuss the activities we just went over.
  - What did you like? What didn't you like?
  - What would you like to try.
  - Do you have any other ideas for group work/projects, writing, listening, or speaking activities to promote autonomy?

Once groups are done discussing, have volunteers share with the class.

Next Workshop Information

A survey will again be sent out following this workshop. Please respond as soon as you are able to so that any questions can be discussed in workshop 3.

{Workshop 3 date, time, location here}

Sources

Bekleyen, N., & Selimoğlu, F. (2016). Learner behaviors and perceptions of autonomous language learning. *The Electronic Journal for English as a Foreign Language, 20*(3). Retrieved from https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1122803

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Fostering Autonomous Learning

Workshop 3

Welcome!

- Icebreaking
- Questions
- Long-term implementation
- Self-access centers
- Surveying students
- Group work

Welcome the students and briefly discuss what will be covered in this workshop

Icebreaking

- Return to your group
- Each person should share:
  - Strategies tried
  - What successes did you have?
  - What failures did you encounter?

Have students return to their same groups and discuss the questions. Have volunteers share some examples once groups have finished their discussions

Questions from the Surveys

{Here, the facilitator should customize this slide based on questions and concerns brought up during the follow-up survey to workshop 2. Included here are examples but again this should be customized.}

1. How can I find evidence that what I am doing is working?
2. What are some more activity ideas for in and out of the classroom?
3. How can I fit these ideas into an established curriculum?

Be sure to customize this slide. Keep the conversation open. The facilitator should offer ideas and strategies but also open it up to the group to get ideas and solutions. The facilitator could have the groups talk through some questions to come up with strategies together.

Long-term Implementation

- In workshop 1 we discussed a basic framework for implementation (Reinders, 2010):
  - Students should identify their needs
  - Goal setting
  - Planning
  - Select resources and learning strategies
- It may be helpful for you as a teacher to come up with a plan on how you will implement this with each new class at the beginning of the semester.
- Handouts, a presentation

Consider any handouts you want to give your students related to goal setting, creating a learning plan, and selecting resources/strategies.

Create a presentation on the importance of autonomous learning, your expectations of students, what they should expect from you, how to set goals, what resources are available, and teach some basic learning strategies.

You might consider dedicating a whole class to this if possible or work it into several classes.

Long-term Implementation

- Think about what additional resources are available to your students.
- Is there a library or a place where students can find books both for learning and for pleasure reading the target language?

One of the roles of the teacher is to provide students with resources that will aid their learning. Consider libraries both in the school and in the community. See what they have available to your students and what you would recommend.

Keep a list of websites and technological resources you find that might be helpful to you students.

Self-Access Centers

- Self-Access Center: A space for students to study and find resources
- Students can utilize space to work together, practice their language, find teacher-selected resources that may be useful to them while learning on their own.
- Does anything like this exist in your school?
- Reinders (2006) found that students used SACs often and found them useful when they were comfortable with autonomous learning.

Could be an idea to pitch to leaders in your school. Perhaps could be an area of the library. Teacher-selected resources include things like textbooks with audio and answer keys.

Surveying Students

- Simple language so that students understand the questions.
- Ensure that surveys remain anonymous so that you get the best results.
- Please give a copy of the paper survey you have been given to your students and compile the results before workshop 4. You will share your results with your small group.
- Survey was created at https://www.freequestionnairemaker.com/

When implementing something new like this, surveying your students to get their thoughts and opinions can really help you improve what you are doing and see it from their perspective. For the purposes of this workshop, you will be provided with a copy of a survey you can give your students. Please do this and gather the responses before workshop 4.

Groups

- What steps do you plan to take to implement autonomous learning with new classes?
- How are your steps similar or different to what you did this time.
- Any other questions or concerns you would like to address with your group.

Once groups are done discussing, have volunteers share with the class.

Next Workshop Information

Please remember to survey your students and bring the results to the next, and final, workshop.

{Workshop 4 date, time, location here}

Sources

Reinders, H. (2006). Supporting self-directed learning through an electronic learning environment. *Supporting Independent Learning: Issues and Interventions*. 219-238. Retrieved from https://innovationinteaching.org/docs/article-2006-independent-learning-book.pdf

Reinders, H. (2010). Towards a classroom pedagogy for learner autonomy: A framework of independent language learning skills. *Australian Journal of Teacher Education* (Online), 35(5), 40-55. Retrieved from https://ro.ecu.edu.au/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1454&context=ajte

Fostering Autonomous Learning

Workshop 4

Welcome!

- Icebreaking
- Group discussion
- Additional Resources
- Follow-up Survey
- Final Questions

Welcome the group back and provide a brief overview of today's workshop

Icebreaking

- Return to your group

- Each person should share:
  - Strategies/plans implemented for long-term implementation (discussed in workshop 3).
  - What successes did you have?
  - What failures did you encounter?
  - Any questions for your small group or whole group?

Have students return to their groups and discuss how their implementation has been going in their classrooms. Have volunteers share after groups are done discussing.

Groups

- In your group, please discuss your findings from the surveys of your students.
- Were you surprised by the findings?
- What is working? What is not working?
- How can you improve the experience of your students?
- Any questions, comments, concerns you would like to address with your small group or the whole group?

After groups have finished sharing with each other, bring these questions to the whole group.

Where to from here?

- Continue your implementation and continuously learn and grow from the experience.
- Seek out additional resources:
  - Check the sources cited in presentations from workshops 1-3
  - www.teachenglish.org.uk/autonomy
    - This is from the British Council.
  - https://www.apa.org/education/k12/learners
    - This cite provides a great overview as well as links to additional information such as books on the subject.

This is an ever evolving and expanding topic so please continue to educate yourself and find fresh ideas. Here are a few resources but know that there are many more out there.

Follow-up Survey

Please be on the lookout for a follow-up survey to this professional development. It will be sent via the e-mail you provided.

Let the group know approximately when the survey wlll be sent out.

Any final questions?

Thank you!

APPENDIX C

Workshops 1-4 Handouts

Workshop attendees should receive a handout of the Google slides at the beginning of

each workshop.

Printing instructions:

File → Print settings and preview

Change settings to:

- Handout - 3 slides per page

- Portrait

APPENDIX D

Workshop 1 Follow-up Survey

Facilitators should go to the link below, make a copy, and email the link to workshop attendees.

https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1FB-6hinCr5KrkWgVxeJaOYGMInRLCr9-4-TPk PTQDP8/edit?usp=sharing

Email template:

Hello,

Thank you for attending the Fostering Autonomous Learning workshop 1 on {insert date}. Please complete this follow-up survey prior to workshop 2 on {insert workshop 2 date}. The facilitator will address any questions brought up in the survey during workshop 2.

Please follow this link: {insert link here}

Thank you for your time and cooperation.

APPENDIX E

Workshop 2 Follow-up Survey

Facilitators should go to the link below, make a copy, and email the link to workshop attendees.

https://docs.google.com/forms/d/18txXxS2Q23ampNTv-MuYy8z2VgOJ7hDvZsIlD QeEz3I/edit?usp=sharing

Email template:

Hello,

Thank you for attending the Fostering Autonomous Learning Workshop 2 on {insert date}. Please complete this follow-up survey prior to workshop 3 on {insert workshop 3 date}. The facilitator will address any questions brought up in the survey during workshop 3.

Please follow this link: {insert link here}

Thank you for your time and cooperation.

APPENDIX F

Survey Handout to Survey Students

Attendees at the workshop should receive a physical copy of this that they can make

copies of and distribute to their students.

Autonomous Learning Student Survey

How did you feel about autonomous learning at the beginning?

It was something I was already doing   I knew about it but did not do it   It was new to me

How much do you feel autonomous learning helped you reach your goals?

Completely   Somewhat   Neutral   A little bit   Not at all

Did you feel like you had a clear plan for your learning outside of class?

Completely   Somewhat   Neutral   A little bit   Not at all

Would you like more teachers to implement methods of autonomous learning in their class?

Completely   Somewhat   Neutral   A little bit   Not at all

Do you think your plan increased your knowledge of English?

Completely   Somewhat   Neutral   A little bit   Not at all

Which activities did you find most useful?

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

Which activities did you find least useful?

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

Do you think you will continue to use a study plan and goal setting in the future?

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

Do you have any other comments, questions, or concerns?

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

APPENDIX G

Final Follow-up Survey

Facilitators should go to the link below, make a copy, and email the link to workshop attendees.

https://docs.google.com/forms/d/13nknzdV9lgbIUgSaPFEaL60IgzQxSnFojWhtKQtpy1E/edit?usp=sharing

Email template:

Hello,

Thank you for attending the Fostering Autonomous Learning Workshop. I hope the knowledge you gained will be valuable to your teaching practice. Please complete this survey at your convenience. It will help to make this workshop more valuable and effective to educators in the future.

Please follow this link: {insert link here}

Thank you for your time and cooperation.

APPENDIX H

Link to Materials

Link to workshop slides, handouts, scripts, and surveys

https://linktr.ee/veenhuisMATESOLproject