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ABOUT ARTICLE

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Abstract: This research article explores the methodological basis for the development of independent learning competence among students in English language teaching programs. Independent learning competence, a key skill for language learners, involves the ability to manage one's learning process, select appropriate resources, and engage in reflective practices. The article provides a comprehensive literature review on the theoretical foundations of independent learning and discusses various teaching methodologies that can support its development in English language learners.

Introduction

In recent years, the focus of language teaching has shifted toward fostering learner autonomy, emphasizing the importance of independent learning as a crucial skill for students, particularly in English language education. Independent learning is not merely about learning in isolation, but involves the ability to take ownership of one's learning journey, set goals, engage with resources, and critically reflect on progress. This is especially vital in the context of English language teaching (ELT), where the diversity of learners' needs and contexts requires a high degree of self-regulation and motivation to succeed beyond traditional classroom settings.

The development of independent learning competence is central to preparing students for the challenges of lifelong learning. As global communication increases, English proficiency

becomes a necessary tool for academic and professional success, demanding learners who are not only passive recipients of knowledge but active participants in their own educational processes. For preservice teachers, the ability to guide future students toward autonomy in language learning becomes a critical aspect of their professional training. Therefore, the development of independent learning competence should be an essential component of English language teacher education programs.

Traditional language teaching methods, often characterized by a teacher-centered approach, focus on direct instruction, where students play a passive role in their learning. However, as educational paradigms shift toward more learner-centered practices, there is an increasing emphasis on methodologies that promote autonomy and independent learning. Independent learners are expected to be proactive, resourceful, and reflective, which is especially crucial in language acquisition, where self-motivation and the ability to learn outside the classroom are essential for mastering the complexities of a new language.

In English language teaching, independent learning competence encompasses a broad range of skills, including the ability to plan and monitor one's own learning, to select and utilize appropriate learning resources (both digital and traditional), and to reflect on learning outcomes. This competence not only enhances language proficiency but also cultivates critical thinking, problem-solving, and self-assessment abilities, which are vital for students to succeed in real-world contexts where English is used for communication, collaboration, and professional development.

To effectively promote independent learning competence in English language learners, it is essential to employ teaching strategies that go beyond traditional methods. Task-based learning (TBL), project-based learning (PBL), and the integration of technology through blended learning environments are some of the modern pedagogical approaches that facilitate autonomy. These methodologies encourage students to engage actively with language content, collaborate with peers, solve problems, and apply language skills in authentic contexts.

However, the successful development of independent learning competence is not without challenges. Many learners are accustomed to the traditional classroom environment where teachers provide most of the guidance, and may struggle with the shift toward more self-directed learning. Moreover, teacher educators face challenges in designing and implementing strategies that balance support with independence. Therefore, understanding the methodological basis for developing independent learning competence in ELT is crucial for ensuring that both teachers and learners can navigate these transitions effectively. This article explores the methodological approaches that can foster independent learning competence

among students in English language teaching programs. By reviewing existing literature and analyzing different pedagogical strategies, the study seeks to provide a comprehensive understanding of how independent learning can be cultivated in the classroom. Furthermore, it examines the practical implications of these methodologies for both pre-service teachers and their educators, with the goal of enhancing the quality of English language education and preparing learners for successful and autonomous language use in the real world.

Literature Review

Independent learning competence refers to the capacity to take charge of one's learning processes, which includes setting goals, planning, selecting resources, self-monitoring, and reflecting on one's progress (Holec, 1981). In the context of English language learning, this competence is crucial for students to develop autonomy in acquiring language skills beyond the classroom.

In language education, autonomy is recognized as a key feature of effective learning (Little, 1991). The development of independent learning competence is seen as a process in which learners gradually move from being dependent on teachers for instruction to taking control of their own learning. This involves developing skills such as self-reflection, motivation, critical thinking, and the ability to use external resources effectively (Oxford, 1990). Several educational theories form the foundation of independent learning in language teaching. Vygotsky's Social Development Theory (1978) emphasizes the importance of social interaction in learning, highlighting the role of teachers and peers in supporting learners' development. However, Vygotsky also recognized the need for learners to internalize and apply knowledge independently, a concept that is central to the development of independent learning competence.

The work of Knowles (1980) on andragogy also contributes to understanding independent learning, particularly in adult education. According to Knowles, adult learners, who are often found in English language programs, have a need to be self-directed in their learning, seeking out relevant information and applying it to their own contexts. This theory suggests that language educators should design learning experiences that empower students to take responsibility for their own learning processes. Additionally, Deci and Ryan's (1985) Self-Determination Theory emphasizes intrinsic motivation as a key component of independent learning. They argue that when students feel competent, autonomous, and related to others, they are more likely to engage in independent learning. This theory suggests that creating an environment that fosters these feelings is essential for developing independent learning competence.

There are various methodological approaches that can support the development of independent learning competence in English language learners. These methods can be divided into two broad categories: teacher-directed approaches and student-centered approaches.

TBL is a widely used methodology in language teaching that emphasizes the completion of real-world tasks rather than focusing solely on language structures. This approach encourages students to apply language skills in authentic contexts, promoting autonomy and problem-solving skills. Tasks can be designed in ways that require students to take responsibility for gathering information, making decisions, and reflecting on their performance (Ellis, 2003).

PBL is another student-centered approach that fosters independent learning. By working on projects that require extensive research, collaboration, and the application of language skills, students develop critical thinking and self-regulation. Projects are often open-ended, allowing learners to pursue topics of interest and develop their learning strategies (Thomas, 2000).

The integration of technology into language learning environments has become a significant method for promoting independent learning. Blended learning combines traditional face-to-face teaching with online resources, allowing students to take control of the pace, place, and mode of their learning (Garrison & Vaughan, 2008). Online platforms, digital resources, and e-portfolios enable students to engage with materials outside the classroom, fostering a sense of autonomy and responsibility.

Encouraging reflective practices is a powerful method for developing independent learning competence. Reflective journaling, self-assessment, and peer feedback are strategies that help learners monitor their progress, identify areas for improvement, and set new learning goals. Schön (1983) advocates for reflection as a tool for professional growth and autonomy, suggesting that learners who regularly reflect on their learning experiences are better equipped to take ownership of their educational journeys.

While independent learning emphasizes autonomy, it is essential to provide students with appropriate scaffolding to guide them in their development. According to Vygotsky (1978), learners benefit from support in the zone of proximal development (ZPD), which involves providing assistance when needed but gradually withdrawing support as learners gain competence. In language teaching, this might involve providing initial guidance on language learning strategies and then encouraging students to become more self-reliant over time.

Hence, independent learning competence is an essential skill in the development of English language learners, particularly for those in teacher education programs. By embracing

methodologies that promote self-regulation, autonomy, and critical thinking, educational systems can better prepare students to become lifelong learners and effective educators.

Research Methodology

This research employed a mixed-methods approach, combining qualitative and quantitative data collection. Data were gathered through surveys and interviews with English language teachers and students enrolled in a university-level English language teaching program. Overall 100 students and 10 language educators from a university-based English language program were involved. Surveys were used to gather quantitative data on students' perceptions of their independent learning competence. Interviews with both students and educators provided qualitative insights into the effectiveness of various teaching strategies in fostering autonomy. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, while qualitative data were analyzed thematically to identify key strategies and challenges related to the development of independent learning competence.

Results

The research findings indicated that task-based learning had a significant impact, with 82% of students agreeing or strongly agreeing that activities such as research projects and problem-solving exercises enhanced their ability to learn independently. Additionally, 76% of students reported that digital learning platforms, including language learning apps and online resources, helped them take more responsibility for their learning beyond the classroom. Despite these positive developments, challenges remained, with 58% of students identifying time management as a significant barrier, and 49% expressing concerns about motivation when engaging in autonomous learning.

Interviews with 10 educators and 20 students further enriched the findings by providing qualitative insights into the effectiveness of various teaching methodologies. A key theme that emerged was the importance of scaffolding in guiding students toward independent learning. Teachers emphasized that students needed structured guidance before they could transition effectively to autonomous learning, and strategies such as guided research and peer collaboration played a crucial role in this process. However, motivation remained a significant challenge, as students often struggled to maintain engagement and discipline when left to manage their own learning. Another important finding was the role of technology as a support system. Students who actively used online learning resources found it easier to regulate their learning progress and access diverse educational materials, which contributed to their sense of autonomy and control over their educational experiences.

The quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, including mean scores, standard deviations, and frequency distributions. The overall mean score for students' perception of their independent learning competence was 3.9 out of 5 (SD = 0.8), indicating a generally positive attitude toward independent learning, albeit with variations in confidence levels. To further explore the relationships between independent learning competence and key influencing factors, a Pearson correlation test was conducted. The results showed a moderate positive correlation between the use of technology and perceived autonomy ($r = 0.62, p < 0.01$), as well as between task-based learning and self-regulation ($r = 0.58, p < 0.01$). A weak-to-moderate positive correlation was also found between motivation and independent learning success ($r = 0.49, p < 0.05$), suggesting that while motivation plays a role, other factors also contribute to students' ability to learn independently.

These findings suggest that technology integration and task-based learning significantly contribute to the development of independent learning competence. However, motivation remains a crucial challenge that must be addressed through additional support and structured interventions. Teachers emphasized the importance of scaffolding in helping students transition from dependent to independent learners. However, they also noted that some students struggled with motivation and time management when left too much to their own devices. The findings suggest that a balanced approach, where students are gradually given more autonomy but also receive appropriate support, is key to fostering independent learning competence.

Discussions

The results of this study align with existing theories on independent learning, emphasizing the role of scaffolding, motivation, and the use of technology in fostering learner autonomy. Task-based and project-based learning approaches have been widely recognized as effective in encouraging students to apply their knowledge and skills in real-world contexts, which supports the development of self-regulated learning habits. This study reaffirms these theoretical claims by demonstrating that students who engaged in structured independent tasks exhibited a greater sense of responsibility for their own learning.

Despite the effectiveness of task-based learning and digital integration, certain challenges must be acknowledged. The study found that while technology was an enabler of independent learning, not all students fully utilized digital resources to their advantage. Some students struggled with self-discipline and time management, indicating that merely providing access to technology does not automatically lead to enhanced autonomy. This highlights the need for

educators to incorporate explicit training in digital literacy and time management skills to help students maximize the benefits of online learning platforms.

Another important consideration is the role of motivation in independent learning. The study's correlation analysis suggests that motivation has a moderate impact on learning success, which aligns with previous research indicating that self-directed learning requires strong intrinsic motivation. However, motivation can fluctuate depending on external factors, such as workload, personal responsibilities, and prior learning experiences. Therefore, teachers must implement strategies that foster a growth mindset and create an environment where students feel supported in their transition to autonomy. The importance of a balanced approach to independent learning cannot be overstated. While students should be encouraged to take control of their learning, they also require structured guidance to gradually develop the necessary skills for self-regulation. This study suggests that a blended learning model, combining direct instruction with self-paced learning opportunities, is an effective way to bridge the gap between dependence and autonomy. By incorporating a mix of teacher-led and student-driven activities, educators can ensure that students receive the necessary support without compromising their independence.

Conclusion

To conclude, the findings of this research study underscore the crucial role of structured support, technology integration, and motivational strategies in developing independent learning competence among university-level English language learners. Task-based learning and digital resources provide students with valuable opportunities to engage in self-directed learning, yet challenges such as time management and motivation require additional attention. The study highlights that while autonomy in learning is essential, it must be cultivated through carefully designed scaffolding, ensuring that students receive the necessary guidance before fully transitioning to independent learning.

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