

What is learner autonomy and why should it be encouraged?

Autonomous learners are those who explicitly accept responsibility for their own learning (e.g., Little, 1991). The autonomous learner shows initiative regarding learning, and shares in monitoring progress and evaluating the extent to which learning is achieved (Schunk, 2005). Fostering the development of learner autonomy rests on the pedagogical claim that in formal educational contexts, reflectivity and self-awareness produce better learning (Pintrich, 2000). Autonomous learners willingly partner with faculty and peers in learning, and are reflective about their own learning.

Autonomous learners are intrinsically motivated to learn and evidence life-long learning. The term stems from self-regulated or self-directed learning. Benson and Voller (1997) defined learner autonomy as the ability to take personal or “self regulated” responsibility for learning and it is widely theorized to predict academic performance (Salisbury et al., 2001). It is also theorized that student achievement motivation expectancies regarding academic confidence, achievement goals, and learning strategies forecasts learner autonomy (Eccles & Roeser, 2003; Thanasoulas, 2000). For example, it is unlikely a student with poor academic confidence would easily become an autonomous learner.

See also:

Benson, P., & Voller, P. (Eds.) (1997). *Autonomy and independence in language learning*. London: Longman.

Little, D. (1991) *Learner Autonomy 1: Definitions, Issues and Problems*. Dublin: Authentik.

Schunk, D. H. (2005) Self-regulated learning: The educational legacy of Paul R. Pintrich. *Educational Psychologist*, 40, 85-94.

Pintrich, P., Roeser, R., & De Groot, E. (1994) Classroom and individual differences in early adolescents' motivation and self-regulated learning. *Journal of Early Adolescence*, 14, 139-161.

Thanasoulas, D. (2000). What is learner autonomy and how can it be fostered? *Internet TESL Journal*, 6, 1-11.

A more complete bibliography on learner autonomy and research on learner autonomy can be found at <http://www.sotl.ilstu.edu/castlAahe/learnAutonomy/biblio.shtml>