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Strategies for Developing Foreign Language Learner Autonomy

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In the modern educational world the issue of foreign language learner autonomy is becoming more and more significant. Post-method pedagogy, which questions the effectiveness of the method as a teaching tool, replaces the traditional method with alternative macrostrategies that determine the main directions of the modern teacher's activity. One of the fundamental macrostrategies is the autonomy of the language learner. In the post-method era the language learner manages their own learning activities using numerous and diverse learning strategies, which is a crucial component of mastery of a foreign language. Learner autonomy strengthens the sense of responsibility and motivation, promotes in-depth understanding of the language and dramatically improves language skills and critical thinking.

Generally, the term autonomy has come to be used in at least five ways (Benson, Voller, 1997: 2): 1. for situations in which learners study entirely on their own; 2. for a set of skills which can be learned and applied in self-directed learning; 3. for an inborn capacity which is suppressed by institutional education; 4. for the exercise of learners' responsibility for their own learning; 5. for the right of learners to determine the direction of their own learning. The relevant literature is riddled with innumerable definitions of autonomy and other synonyms for it, such as "independence" (Sheerin, 1991), "language awareness" (Lier, 1996), "self-direction" (Candy, 1991), which testifies to the importance attached to it by scholars. One of the most important spin-offs of more communicatively oriented language learning and teaching has been the premium placed on the role of the learner in the language learning process (Wenden, 1998: xi). Learner autonomy is "essentially a matter of the learner's psychological relation to the process and content of learning - a capacity for detachment, critical reflection, decision-making, and independent action" (Little, 1991: 4).

Post-method pedagogy distinguishes three types of autonomy: academic, relational and socio-political. Academic autonomy is directly linked to the learning process. Owing to the current knowledge and experience of learning strategies, the language learner maximizes their potential. Relational autonomy implies the effective cooperation of the language learner with all participants of the educational process. The third type is much broader and includes social and political aspects. It is based on critical pedagogy which highlights the importance of socio-political institutions in the educational process and confirms that it is impossible to separate the learning environment from their dynamics. The language learner must identify all socio-political obstacles that stand in the way of realizing their potential and apply appropriate intellectual methods to eliminate them, which contributes to their development as a critical thinker (Kumaravadivelu, 2006).

This paper deals with the strategies that the teacher uses to ensure the autonomy of the language learner. The most effective strategies include setting clear, specific, achievable, relevant and time-bound goals; providing the opportunity for initiative and choice (in terms of material, topic and type of tasks, learning methods, etc.), which enhances the sense of control over one's own learning activities;

incorporating modern technologies into the learning process in the form of online platforms, resources and artificial intelligence, which makes the student an active member of the foreign language world beyond the classroom; and promoting reflective practices (predominantly through the use of diaries, portfolios, self-assessment questionnaires and peer feedback mechanisms), which helps the language learner identify existing challenges, select the most optimal learning skills, styles and methods and effectively assess progress. While developing learner autonomy it is also important to provide appropriate support and scaffolding from the teacher. The initial level of support is gradually reduced as the student develops into an independent language learner.

Teaching foreign language learners to set clear, specific, achievable, relevant and time-bound goals (often referred to as SMART goals) can significantly enhance their learning experience and motivation. Teachers should adopt a step-by-step approach to help students set effective goals and start by introducing the SMART criteria in simple terms, breaking it down for their students:

- **Specific:** The goal should be clear and unambiguous. Instead of saying, “I want to learn English,” make it more concrete, such as, “I want to learn 20 new vocabulary words related to food.”

- **Measurable:** The goal should be quantifiable. For example, “I will write a 150-word essay by the end of the week”.

- **Achievable:** The goal should be realistic based on the student’s current level and available resources. “I will improve my listening skills by watching one English video with subtitles each day” is a goal that can be realistically accomplished.

- **Relevant:** The goal should be meaningful and aligned with the learner’s personal or academic needs. “I want to improve my speaking skills for a job interview” is a relevant goal if the student is preparing for employment.

- **Time-bound:** The goal should have a deadline or a time frame. For example, “I will complete my grammar workbook in 2 weeks”.

Afterwards it is advisable to understand each student’s current proficiency in different areas (speaking, listening, reading, writing, vocabulary, etc.). This helps in guiding them to set realistic goals based on their current abilities. A self-assessment or a diagnostic test can be helpful in identifying their strengths and areas for improvement. Students should also be encouraged to think about their personal motivations for learning a foreign language (Do they need it for school or work? Are they preparing for a specific exam or task? Do they have social or cultural reasons for learning it?). These reasons can guide their goals and make them more relevant.

Teachers can model the process by walking through an example goal-setting exercise with the class. They choose a topic, like improving vocabulary, and demonstrate how to turn a broad goal into a SMART goal (for instance, broad goal: “I want to improve my English”; SMART goal: “I will learn 10 new words related to shopping by the end of this week by studying flashcards for 15 minutes every day”).

Breaking goals into sub-goals help students break larger goals into smaller, more manageable sub-goals. This makes progress measurable and helps avoid feelings of being overwhelmed (for example, main goal: “Improve my speaking skills”; sub-goals: “Practice pronunciation for 10 minutes every day”, “Engage in one English conversation every week”).

Once the student has their SMART goal, teachers help them outline a step-by-step action plan to achieve it. This plan should include: the resources they will need (a dictionary, app or tutor), specific activities (like watching a video, practicing with a partner, or doing grammar exercises) and the time commitment (e.g. 30 minutes each day).

Setting up regular check-ins to track the progress of students is also helpful. This could be weekly or bi-weekly, depending on the goal timeline. Teachers and students discuss what went well, what challenges they faced and whether the goal needs adjusting. This helps maintain motivation and ensures accountability. Constructive feedback will help them improve and refine their goals as they move forward. Sometimes students may set goals that are too challenging or too easy. Teachers should be

open to revisiting and revising goals. This can happen through periodic reviews or when students encounter unexpected challenges. Teachers offer positive reinforcement when students make progress toward their goals. Even small achievements should be celebrated. This helps reinforce the idea that goal-setting leads to positive outcomes, boosting their confidence and motivation to keep going. By guiding foreign language learners through this process, you help them not only learn a foreign language more effectively, but also build important skills for self-motivation and time management.

Another effective strategy for ensuring learner autonomy is providing opportunities for initiative and choice for foreign language learners. This is key to fostering engagement, motivation and language development. In order to create those opportunities learners can choose learning materials and activities: students are offered a variety of resources - materials at different language proficiency levels (e.g. picture books, simplified texts, videos, podcasts), so learners can choose what suits them best; they are allowed to pick the format for their work (e.g. a written report, video presentation, or art project) to encourage them to take ownership of their learning process; they are offered different levels of tasks within the same lesson, so students can choose activities that are appropriately challenging for them; they work with each learner to set language development goals that reflect their interests and needs, making it more meaningful; they are allowed to reflect on their progress and set new goals, giving them a sense of autonomy and responsibility for their learning; teachers encourage students to work with peers, either in heterogeneous or homogeneous groups and students can choose groups based on their interests or preferred working styles; teachers assign students the role of “language buddies,” where they can help and learn from one another, making the learning process more interactive and self-directed; teachers allow learners to choose topics that interest them for projects. This helps them practice language in a context that is meaningful to them; teachers use questions in lessons that require more than yes/no answers, allowing students to express their ideas, thoughts and opinions in a foreign language; teachers allow learners to explore topics, texts, or activities related to their cultural backgrounds. This helps them to see their identity reflected in the classroom and feel a stronger connection to the content; teachers provide diverse reading materials that reflect various cultures, languages and experiences and let students choose what resonates with them; teachers provide access to digital platforms and apps (like language-learning games or speech-to-text tools) where students can choose the pace and focus of their learning; teachers set up virtual discussion forums where learners can participate in conversations, ask questions and express opinions on topics of their choice; teachers create a classroom environment where students feel comfortable making mistakes and trying new things, which fosters initiative; teachers recognize both small and large achievements in language learning, so students are motivated to keep improving; teachers provide choices in assessment methods such as oral presentations, written assignments, multimedia projects, etc., allowing learners to show their progress in a way that best reflects their strengths. By incorporating these strategies, foreign language learners will have the opportunity to take initiative in their own learning, build confidence and feel more connected to the content and classroom environment.

Incorporating modern technologies into the foreign language learning process can significantly enhance students’ engagement, accessibility and retention of the language. Apps like Duolingo, Babbel, and Memrise use gamification to make learning fun and engaging. These apps offer interactive exercises that help with vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation and listening skills. Platforms like Coursera, Udemy, and edX provide structured courses in English from basic to advanced levels. Virtual classrooms, such as those on Zoom, Google Meet, or Microsoft Teams allow for real-time interaction between teachers and students. Tools like Google Assistant, Siri and language learning apps with voice recognition can help students practice pronunciation and listening. Some language apps give feedback on the clarity and accuracy of spoken English, allowing learners to improve their speaking skills. Grammarly, ProWritingAid and similar tools help learners improve their writing by identifying grammatical errors, suggesting better word choices and improving sentence structure. These tools can be great for learners to get immediate feedback on their written work. Websites like BBC Learning English, Cambridge

English and EnglishClub offer resources such as grammar exercises, vocabulary quizzes and listening practice. Online games or quizzes such as Kahoot or Quizlet can make reviewing language skills fun and competitive. Platforms like YouTube, TED-Ed, or podcasts provide access to authentic content in English, such as interviews, TED talks and tutorials, which help improve listening comprehension and familiarize students with different accents and speaking styles. Tools like Storybird or Adobe Spark allow students to create their own stories and share them online. This fosters creativity while enhancing writing, grammar and language skills. Teachers should encourage learners to use platforms like Instagram, Facebook or language exchange platforms such as HelloTalk or Tandem, where they can interact with native speakers, practice writing and join discussions in English. Immersive learning tools like VR (e.g., Google Expeditions) or AR can offer students virtual environments where they can interact in English, such as virtual trips to English-speaking countries, or simulations of real-world scenarios like ordering food or shopping. AI can provide personalized learning experiences. For instance, adaptive learning platforms such as Busuu or Rosetta Stone tailor content to a learner's specific needs, helping them to progress at their own pace. Websites like Edmodo and Google Classroom allow teachers to create assignments, quizzes and discussions that encourage peer learning. These platforms can facilitate group projects where students work together in English, sharing resources and discussing topics in the language. While not always perfect, tools like Google Translate and Linguee can help students quickly understand vocabulary in context, but they should be used with care to avoid over-reliance on them. By connecting with native speakers through video calls, chat rooms, or social media, learners can immerse themselves in the language. Platforms like italki or Preply allow students to take lessons with native speakers, simulating real-world conversations. Incorporating a combination of these tools and technologies can help create an engaging, effective and personalized learning experience for students. The key is to balance technology with traditional learning methods to create a holistic language acquisition process.

Furthermore, promoting reflective practices in a foreign language classroom is a powerful way to help students become more self-aware, critical thinkers and lifelong learners. Reflective practices encourage students to think about their own learning, identify areas for improvement and build a deeper understanding of themselves as learners. Here are several strategies to promote reflective practices in your classroom:

1. Encourage journaling: have students maintain journals where they can reflect on their learning experiences, challenges and insights. They can write about their thoughts on the material, how a lesson made them feel, or what they might do differently next time; Use prompts to guide their reflections, such as: What did you find most interesting about today's lesson? What is one thing you still don't understand? How can you apply what you have learned to your life outside of school?
2. Facilitate group discussions and peer feedback: encourage students to give and receive feedback on each other's writing. This can be a great way to promote reflective thinking, as students evaluate each other's work and reflect on their own through comparison; After lessons or activities, create space for students to discuss what they have learned and reflect on how they can improve. This can help them identify new perspectives and solidify their learning.
3. Self-assessment and goal setting: provide students with self-assessment rubrics that allow them to evaluate their own progress and reflect on areas for improvement; Help students set personal learning goals at the beginning of a unit or semester. Encourage them to periodically revisit their goals, assess their progress and reflect on how they can continue to improve.
4. Post-activity reflection: after completing reading, writing or speaking activities, ask students to reflect on what they learned. For instance, after a reading comprehension exercise, prompt them to think about: How did the text challenge your thinking? What questions did it raise for you? How could you use the information in your own writing or speaking?
5. Incorporate metacognitive strategies: use "think-aloud" techniques where you model your own thinking process as you work through a text or a writing task. This shows students how to consciously analyze their thinking, which encourages them to do the same; after reading a passage or completing a writing task, ask students to reflect on how they approached the task. Did they use a specific strategy? What worked or didn't work for them?
6. Create a reflective

learning environment: foster a classroom environment where students feel comfortable sharing their reflections without fear of judgment. This includes creating an atmosphere of trust and respect for differing perspectives; promote the idea that mistakes are valuable learning experiences. This helps students feel more comfortable reflecting on challenges and learning from them. 7. Use technology for reflection: students can create digital portfolios where they track their progress over time, reflect on their growth and set new goals. This could be through blogs, video logs, or even audio recordings; platforms like discussion boards or Google Classroom can be used to facilitate online reflection where students post thoughts about lessons or reading material and respond to their peers. 8. Use literature for reflective practice: let students read a variety of texts and discuss how the themes or characters resonate with their own experiences. Encourage them to reflect on how the stories might change their own thinking or behavior; when students analyze texts, encourage them to reflect on how the themes relate to their own lives and experiences. Ask questions like: “Have you ever experienced something similar to the main character?” 9. Model reflective practices: share with your students your reflections on the lesson or unit. Explain what went well, what you could improve and how you will adapt in the future. This models the reflective process for them; in your feedback to students, include reflective comments that encourage them to think about how they approached their work and what they might do differently next time. 10. Encourage reflection at the end of the term: at the end of a unit or semester, ask students to compile a portfolio of their work and reflect on their growth as learners; give students the opportunity to reflect on their overall progress in a foreign language, identifying their strengths and areas where they feel they need further practice. By incorporating these strategies, you can create an environment where reflective practice is woven into the fabric of your foreign language classroom. This will not only help students deepen their learning, but also empower them to take ownership of their education.

Providing appropriate support and scaffolding in a foreign language classroom is also essential for helping students develop their language skills effectively. Scaffolding refers to the temporary support that teachers offer students to help them perform tasks they cannot yet complete independently. Over time, this support is gradually reduced as students gain more independence. Here are some strategies to provide support and scaffolding in the classroom:

1. Pre-teach vocabulary

Support: Introduce key vocabulary and phrases before a lesson. Use visual aids, flashcards, or realia (objects from real life) to make the new words more relatable.

Scaffolding: Create word walls or charts where students can refer to the words as they encounter them in reading or discussions.

2. Provide clear instructions

Support: Use simple, clear language and step-by-step instructions when explaining tasks or assignments.

Scaffolding: Give instructions both verbally and visually, such as through slides, diagrams or charts. Consider using sentence starters or prompts for writing assignments.

3. Modeling

Support: Demonstrate tasks or language skills you expect students to use. For example, model how to start a conversation, write a paragraph, or answer a question.

Scaffolding: As students become more familiar with the task, gradually involve them in the process by asking them to complete parts of the task together with you.

4. Use collaborative learning

Support: Pair or group students so they can work together. Encourage peer support where students can share ideas and correct each other's mistakes.

Scaffolding: Structure collaborative tasks with specific roles (e.g. one student might focus on grammar, another on vocabulary), so that students can support each other's learning in different ways.

5. Use sentence frames and starters

Support: Provide sentence starters or frames to help students structure their responses. For example: “I think that... because...” or “In my opinion...”

Scaffolding: As students progress, reduce the use of sentence frames and encourage more independent expression.

6. Provide visual aids

Support: Use pictures, videos, charts and diagrams to reinforce language and concepts. Visual aids help contextualize new vocabulary and ideas.

Scaffolding: Encourage students to create their own visual aids (e.g. mind maps, vocabulary posters) to reinforce their learning and deepen understanding.

7. Interactive activities

Support: Engage students with activities that promote interaction, such as games, discussions, role-plays and debates.

Scaffolding: Provide structured prompts and guidance during these activities. As students become more confident, allow them to take on more responsibility for leading the activities.

8. Chunking information

Support: Break down large amounts of information into smaller, manageable chunks. For example, when teaching grammar or a long reading passage, divide it into smaller sections.

Scaffolding: Gradually increase the complexity of the information over time, allowing students to build their skills incrementally.

9. Use of technology

Support: Incorporate language learning apps or websites that provide interactive exercises, quizzes, and games to reinforce foreign language skills.

Scaffolding: Guide students in using these tools effectively and gradually encourage them to use the tools independently.

10. Give constructive feedback

Support: Offer positive reinforcement and specific, constructive feedback. Praise effort, not just correct answers, to motivate students.

Scaffolding: Focus on one area for improvement at a time. Encourage students to set personal goals based on the feedback, helping them monitor their own progress.

11. Allow time for reflection

Support: After completing tasks, provide students with time to reflect on what they learned and how they can improve.

Scaffolding: Encourage them to talk about their learning process with a partner or in writing. Provide guiding questions that help them articulate their thoughts.

12. Differentiated instruction

Support: Tailor your teaching strategies to meet the diverse needs of students in your classroom. This may include providing more visual support, offering additional practice, or using simplified language for students who need it.

Scaffolding: As students become more proficient, increase the complexity of tasks to challenge them while still offering support when necessary.

13. Provide opportunities for practice

Support: Offer students frequent opportunities to practice their language skills in varied contexts, both inside and outside the classroom.

Scaffolding: Initially, provide guided practice with a lot of support, then reduce the level of assistance as students gain more confidence and competence.

By combining these strategies, you can create a supportive and dynamic classroom environment where students are encouraged to grow in their language skills. The key is to provide the right level of assistance to help them achieve success and gradually reduce that support as they become more capable.

Thus, fostering learner autonomy not only enhances foreign language proficiency but also prepares students for lifelong learning beyond the classroom, which is one of the fundamental aspects of the modern educational paradigm.

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ნინო თავიდაშვილი

აკაკი წერეთლის სახელმწიფო უნივერსიტეტი

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უცხოური ენის შემსწავლელის ავტონომიის განვითარების სტრატეგიები

თანამედროვე საგანმანათლებლო სივრცეში უფრო და უფრო აქტუალური ხდება უცხოური ენის შემსწავლელის ავტონომიის საკითხი. პოსტმეთოდური პედაგოგიკა, რომელიც ეჭვქვეშ აყენებს მეთოდის, როგორც სწავლების ხერხის ეფექტურობას, ტრადიციულ მეთოდს უპირისპირებს ალტერნატიულ მაკროსტრატეგიებს, რომლებიც განსაზღვრავენ თანამედროვე პედაგოგის საქმია-ნობის ძირითად მიმართულებებს. ერთ-ერთ ფუნდამენტურ მაკროსტრატეგიას სწორედ ენის შემსწავლელის ავტონომია წარმოადგენს. პოსტმეთოდურ ეპოქაში ენის შემსწავლელი თავად მართავს საკუთარ სასწავლო საქმიანობას მრავალრიცხოვანი და მრავალფეროვანი სასწავლო სტრატეგიების გამოყენებით, რაც უცხოური ენის ეფექტურად დაუფლების უმნიშვნელოვანესი კომპონენტია. მოსწავლის ავტონომია აძლიერებს პასუხისმგებლობის გრძნობას და მოტივაციას, ხელს უწყობს ენის სიღრმისეულად გააზრებას, მკვეთრად აუმჯობესებს ენობრივ უნარებს და კრიტიკულ აზროვნებას.

პოსტმეთოდური პედაგოგიკა ერთმანეთისგან გამიჯნავს ავტონომიის სამ ნაირსახეობას: აკადემიურს, ურთიერთობითსა და სოციალურ-პოლიტიკურს. აკადემიური ავტონომია უშუალო კავშირშია სწავლის პროცესთან. სასწავლო სტრატეგიების შესახებ დღეისათვის არსებული ცოდნისა და გამოცდილების წყალობით ენის შემსწავლელი მაქსიმალურად აძლიერებს თავის პოტენციალს. ურთიერთობითი ავტონომია გულისხმობს ენის შემსწავლელის ეფექტურ თანამშრომლობას საგანმანათლებლო პროცესის ყველა მონაწილესთან. მესამე ტიპი გაცილებით ფართოა და მოიცავს სოციალურ-პოლიტიკურ

ასპექტებს. იგი ეფუძნება კრიტიკულ პედაგოგიკას, რომელიც გამოკვეთს სოციალურ-პოლიტიკური ინსტიტუტების მნიშვნელობას საგანმანათლებლო პროცესში და ადასტურებს, რომ შეუძლებელია სასწავლო გარემოს გამიჯვნა მათი დინამიკიდან. ენის შემსწავლელმა უნდა ამოიცნოს ყველა სოციალურ-პოლიტიკური წინააღმდეგობა, რომელიც ხვდება თავისი პოტენციალის რეალიზების გზაზე და მათ აღმოსაფხვრელად მიმართოს სათანადო ინტელექტუალურ ხერხებს, რაც ხელს უწყობს მის ჩამოყალიბებას კრიტიკულ მოაზროვნედ.

წინამდებარე ნაშრომი ეძღვნება სტრატეგიებს, რომლებსაც იყენებს მასწავლებელი ენის შემსწავლელის ავტონომიის უზრუნველსაყოფად. ეფექტურ სტრატეგიებს შორის აღსანიშნავია: მკაფიო, კონკრეტული, რეალისტური, რელევანტური და დროში გათვლილი მიზნების დასახვა; ინიციატივის და არჩევანის (სასწავლო მასალის, დავალებების თემატიკის და ტიპის, სწავლის მეთოდის და ა.შ.) შესაძლებლობის უზრუნველყოფა, რაც აძლიერებს საკუთარი სასწავლო საქმიანობის მართვის შეგრძნებას; თანამედროვე ტექნოლოგიების ჩართვა სასწავლო პროცესში ონლაინ პლატფორმების, რესურსების და ხელოვნური ინტელექტის სახით, რაც მოსწავლეს საკლასო ოთახს მიღმა არსებული უცხოენოვანი სამყაროს აქტიურ წევრად აქცევს; და რეფლექსიის პრაქტიკის (უპირატესად, დღიურის, პორტფოლიოს წარმოების, თვითშეფასების კითხვარების შევსების და თანატოლთა უკუკავშირის მექანიზმების გამოყენებით) სტიმულირება, რომელიც ეხმარება ენის შემსწავლელს განსაზღვროს არსებული გამოწვევები, შეარჩიოს მისთვის ყველაზე ოპტიმალური სწავლის უნარ-ჩვევები, სტილი და მეთოდები და ეფექტურად შეაფასოს პროგრესი.

ენის შემსწავლელის ავტონომიის განვითარების პარალელურად მნიშვნელოვანია მასწავლებლის მხრიდან სათანადო მხარდაჭერა და სკაფოლდინგი. თავდაპირველი დახმარების დონე თანდათან, ეტაპობრივად მცირდება მოსწავლის დამოუკიდებელ ენის შემსწავლელად ჩამოყალიბების კვალდაკვალ.

ამრიგად, ენის შემსწავლელის ავტონომია არა მარტო ენის სრულყოფილად დაუფლებას უწყობს ხელს, არამედ, ასევე, უზრუნველყოფს უწყვეტ განათლებას საკლასო გარემოს მიღმა, რაც თანამედროვე საგანმანათლებლო პარადიგმის ერთ-ერთი უმნიშვნელოვანესი ასპექტია.

საკვანძო სიტყვები: პოსტმეთოდური პედაგოგიკა, აკადემიური ავტონომია, ურთიერთობითი ავტონომია, სოციალურ-პოლიტიკური ასპექტები.