

EXPLORING THE ROLE OF TEACHERS IN FOSTERING LEARNER AUTONOMY IN LANGUAGE EDUCATION

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Keywords: teachers' roles; learner autonomy; language education

Learner autonomy (LA) contributes a lot to the success of the foreign language learning process (Teng, 2019). First defined as “an ability to take charge of one’s own learning” by Holec (1981, p. 3), it has been investigated for nearly four decades. It has been misunderstood by quite a few people that LA refers to self-instruction, which means students learn without teachers, and that any intervention from teachers may negatively influence the attainment of LA (Little, 1991). However, research highlights that teachers play new roles to promote LA in classes. This paper aims to explore the roles that teachers may play in autonomous language learning classrooms. In the context of many Asian countries in general and Vietnam in particular where English is yet to be a second language, teachers/instructors of English play an important role in language classrooms as well as in enhancing LA among students, especially with non-English majors. For example, Little (2009) outlines three pedagogical principles that shape teachers’ roles in autonomous learning. The first one is called learner involvement in which learners need to be fully involved in the regulation of cognition or planning, monitoring, and evaluating their learning process. The second is the principle of learner reflection. That is, teachers have to encourage students’ continuous reflection on the learning process and their engagement in self-assessment. The third principle is about target language use. The target language must be used as the medium of communication and the learning goal. Little (2009) draws researchers’ attention to the fact that a framework is established so that each teacher must choose and apply an approach that works with learners in terms of age, proficiency, focus, and goals. Voller (2013) classifies teacher roles into three categories, namely facilitator, counselor, and resource. As a facilitator, teachers provide learners with technical support such as analyzing needs, setting goals, choosing materials, and the like, so that they can plan and carry out their independent learning. Teachers also psycho-socially support learners by being supportive, guiding them to overcome difficulties, raising their awareness of autonomous learning, and so forth. As a counselor, teachers act as supervisors interacting one-to-one to help learners with self-directedness. As a resource, teachers make their knowledge and expertise available. They orient their students towards a variety of other knowledge resources. This role is especially for those who are endeavoring to learn independently but still need help (Alonazi, 2017). To sum up, to effectively foster LA, teachers should become facilitators or learning resources.