Learner Autonomy: The Role of Motivation in Foreign Language Learning

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ABSTRACT

Among the many learner variables that may influence language learning, autonomy is a very unique one because it involves learners being responsible for their own learning. In the current study, autonomy is operationally defined as a construct comprising three components: sense of responsibility, engagement in learning activities, and perceived ability. This study aimed to provide insights into the construct and gain a further understanding of its relationship with motivation among students learning English as a foreign language. The sample included university freshmen who were non-English majors and were taking required English classes at the time of the study. The results suggested that participants possessed a satisfactory level of autonomy when asked about their perceptions of responsibility, whereas they tended to possess an unsatisfactory level of autonomy regarding engagement in learning activities inside or outside the classroom. In addition, the results indicated that students of all three proficiency levels tended to perceive their ability as being mediocre. Significant differences in all three aspects of learner autonomy were observed for participants with different motivation levels. Furthermore, the findings establish that motivation and autonomy had a high level of positive correlation. Engagement frequency of learning activities had the strongest association with motivation, followed by perceived ability and responsibility. Finally, the results revealed that motivation effectively contributed to predicting autonomy, accounting for a relatively high amount (50%) of variance in the dependent variable.

Keywords: language learning, autonomy, motivation, English proficiency

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