

Nurturing Learner Autonomy to Enhance Motivation and Academic Achievement for the L2 Learners in ESL Contexts

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Abstract

This review explores the pivotal role of nurturing learner autonomy in enhancing motivation and academic achievement in English as a Second Language (ESL) contexts. It examines the multifaceted construct of learner autonomy, including self-regulation, metacognitive strategies, and self-directed learning. The review investigates how promoting learner autonomy can positively influence intrinsic motivation, self-efficacy, and persistence, which are essential for successful language learning. It scrutinizes instructional practices, learning environments, and pedagogical interventions that foster learner autonomy, such as learner-centered approaches, providing choices, and encouraging self-assessment and goal-setting. Furthermore, the review critically evaluates the impact of learner autonomy on academic achievement across diverse educational levels and cultural backgrounds, while exploring potential challenges and limitations. Ultimately, it offers practical implications for educators, curriculum designers, and policymakers, emphasizing the importance of empowering learners and cultivating an autonomous learning mindset to enhance motivation and academic achievement in ESL contexts.

1. Introduction

English the ability to learn a second language (L2) has become an increasingly valuable asset in today's globalized world, facilitating cross-cultural communication and opening doors to diverse educational and professional opportunities. However, the process of L2 acquisition can be complex and challenging, with learners facing numerous cognitive, affective, and contextual factors that can either hinder or promote their language learning success (Dörnyei & Ryan, 2015). Among these factors, motivation and learner autonomy have emerged as critical determinants of academic achievement in the field of English as a Second Language (ESL) education (Lamb, 2017; Noels *et al.*, 2019).

Motivation, defined as the driving force that initiates and sustains behavior towards a particular goal (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2011), plays a pivotal role in the language learning process. Highly motivated learners tend to exhibit greater

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persistence, engagement, and effort, ultimately leading to improved language proficiency and academic performance (Lamb, 2017; Papi, 2018). However, motivation is not a static trait but a dynamic construct that can fluctuate over time, influenced by various individual, contextual, and sociocultural factors (Dörnyei & Ryan, 2015; Hossain *et al.*, 2023; Oga-Baldwin & Nakata, 2017).

Learner autonomy, on the other hand, refers to the capacity of learners to take control of their own learning process, making informed decisions about their learning goals, strategies, and resources (Benson, 2013; Little, 2007). Autonomous learners are characterized by their ability to self-regulate, monitor their progress, and adapt their learning approaches to suit their individual needs and preferences (Crabbe, 1993; Dam, 1995). Research has shown that fostering learner autonomy can contribute to increased motivation, self-confidence, and overall academic achievement in language learning contexts (Benson, 2013; Lamb, 2017; Nguyen, 2019).

The relationship between motivation, learner autonomy, and academic achievement in L2 learning has been extensively explored in the literature, with numerous studies highlighting the intricate interplay between these constructs (Burkert & Schwienhorst, 2008; Dickinson, 1995; Dörnyei, 2001; Holec, 1981; Little, 1991). However, much of the existing research has focused on specific contexts, methodologies, or learner populations, leaving gaps in our understanding of the broader implications and applications of nurturing learner autonomy to enhance motivation and, consequently, academic achievement in ESL contexts. This review aims to synthesize the current body of literature on the interconnections between learner autonomy, motivation, and academic achievement in ESL contexts. By critically examining empirical studies from diverse educational settings and methodological approaches, this review seeks to uncover patterns, trends, and insights that can inform pedagogical practices and curricular design in ESL education.

2. The Importance of Autonomy and Motivation in L2 Learning

Motivation has long been recognized as a crucial factor influencing language learning success (Dörnyei & Ryan, 2015; Gardner, 1985; Masgoret & Gardner, 2003). Numerous theoretical models have been proposed to explain the intricate nature of motivation in L2 learning, including the socio-educational model (Gardner, 1985), the self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Noels *et al.*, 2019), and the L2 motivational self-system (Dörnyei, 2005, 2009). The socio-educational model, developed by Gardner (1985), emphasizes the role of integrative and instrumental orientations in shaping an individual's motivation to learn a second language. Integrative orientation refers to the desire to learn the target language to integrate into the host culture, while instrumental orientation pertains to the practical benefits associated with learning the language, such as career advancement or educational opportunities (Gardner, 1985; Masgoret & Gardner, 2003).

Self-determination theory (SDT), proposed by Deci and Ryan (1985), offers a more comprehensive framework for understanding motivation by distinguishing between different types of motivation based on the degree of self-determination or autonomy (Noels *et al.*, 2019). SDT posits that intrinsic motivation, which stems from inherent interest and enjoyment, is the most autonomous and self-determined form of motivation, leading to higher levels of engagement, persistence, and academic achievement (Noels *et al.*, 2019; Ryan & Deci, 2000).

Building upon SDT, Dörnyei's (2005, 2009) L2 motivational self-system theory introduces the concept of the "ideal L2 self," which represents an individual's vision of their future self as a proficient speaker of the target language. This theory suggests that learners are motivated to reduce the discrepancy between their current language proficiency and their idealized L2 self, serving as a powerful source of motivation in language learning (Dörnyei, 2009; Lamb, 2017).

While these theoretical models have provided valuable insights into the nature of motivation in L2 learning, it is essential to recognize that motivation is a dynamic and multifaceted construct influenced by various individual, contextual, and sociocultural factors (Dörnyei & Ryan, 2015; Oga-Baldwin & Nakata, 2017). For instance, factors such as learner beliefs, self-efficacy, learning experiences, classroom environment, and sociocultural influences can all shape an individual's motivation to learn a second language (Dörnyei & Ryan, 2015; Lamb, 2017; Ushioda, 2009).

2.1 Nurturing Learner Autonomy in L2 Learning

A comprehensive Learner autonomy, a concept first introduced by Holec (1981), has gained significant attention in the field of language education due to its potential to promote lifelong learning and enhance academic achievement (Benson, 2013; Little, 2007). Autonomous learners are characterized by their ability to take responsibility for their own learning process, setting goals, selecting resources, monitoring progress, and evaluating outcomes (Benson, 2013; Little, 2007). The development of learner autonomy is often viewed as a continuum, with learners gradually acquiring the skills and competencies necessary to become more self-directed and self-regulated in their learning (Crabbe, 1993; Dam, 1995). This process involves fostering metacognitive awareness, critical thinking skills, and the ability to make informed decisions about one's learning strategies and preferences (Little, 1991; Sinclair, 2000).

Numerous pedagogical approaches and strategies have been proposed to nurture learner autonomy in language learning contexts, including learner-centered instruction, self-access learning centers, portfolios, and technology-enhanced learning environments (Benson, 2013; Burkert & Schwienhorst, 2008; Dam, 1995; Reinders & Hubbard, 2013). Learner-centered instruction emphasizes the active involvement of learners in the learning process, encouraging them to take responsibility for their own learning goals, strategies, and evaluation (Nunan, 1988; Tudor, 1993). This approach often involves activities such as goal-setting,

self-assessment, and reflective learning tasks, which aim to develop learners' metacognitive awareness and self-regulation skills (Benson, 2013; Little, 2007).

Self-access learning centers, often found in language institutes or universities, provide learners with a variety of resources and materials that they can access and utilize according to their individual needs and preferences (Gardner & Miller, 1999; Reinders & Hubbard, 2013). These centers promote independent learning by offering opportunities for self-study, peer collaboration, and access to educational resources and support services (Benson, 2013; Reinders & Hubbard, 2013). Portfolios, both physical and digital, have been widely used as a tool to foster learner autonomy by encouraging learners to document, reflect on, and evaluate their own learning process (Little, 2005; Sinclair, 2000). Portfolios can include a variety of artifacts, such as writing samples, self-assessments, learning logs, and reflective essays, providing learners with a tangible record of their learning journey and progress (Benson, 2013; Little, 2005).

Technology-enhanced learning environments, such as virtual learning platforms, mobile applications, and online language learning resources, have also been explored as means to promote learner autonomy (Reinders & Hubbard, 2013; Schwienhorst, 2008). These digital tools can provide learners with greater flexibility, personalization, and access to authentic language resources, enabling them to take more control over their learning experiences (Benson, 2013; Reinders & Hubbard, 2013).

2.2 Learner Autonomy, Motivation, and Academic Achievement: An Interconnection

While learner autonomy and motivation have been extensively studied as separate constructs in the field of language education, their interconnection and potential synergistic effects on academic achievement have also garnered significant attention (Dickinson, 1995; Dörnyei, 2001; Holec, 1981; Little, 1991; Spratt *et al.*, 2002). Proponents of learner autonomy argue that fostering autonomous learning can enhance learners' motivation by promoting a sense of ownership, control, and responsibility over their learning process (Benson, 2013; Little, 2007; Ushioda, 2011). When learners are actively involved in decision-making, goal-setting, and self-evaluation, they are more likely to develop intrinsic motivation and a deeper commitment to their language learning goals (Dickinson, 1995; Ushioda, 2011).

Conversely, highly motivated learners may be more inclined to take initiative and exercise autonomy in their learning endeavors (Dörnyei, 2001; Lamb, 2017; Spratt *et al.*, 2002). Learners with strong motivation are more likely to seek out opportunities for self-directed learning, engage in self-regulatory strategies, and persist in the face of challenges or setbacks (Dörnyei, 2001; Spratt *et al.*, 2002). This reciprocal relationship between learner autonomy and motivation has been supported by numerous empirical studies across various educational contexts (Dickinson, 1995; Dörnyei, 2001; Lamb, 2017; Nguyen, 2019; Spratt *et al.*, 2002). For instance, Spratt *et al.* (2002) conducted a study with ESL learners in

Hong Kong and found a positive correlation between learner autonomy and motivation, suggesting that promoting autonomy can enhance learners' motivation and, consequently, their language learning success.

Similarly, [Nguyen \(2019\)](#) investigated the relationship between learner autonomy, motivation, and academic achievement among Vietnamese EFL learners. The findings revealed that learners with higher levels of autonomy and motivation tended to achieve better academic performance, highlighting the potential synergistic effects of these constructs on language learning outcomes.

While the interconnections between learner autonomy, motivation, and academic achievement have been widely acknowledged, it is essential to recognize that this relationship is complex and influenced by various contextual and individual factors ([Benson, 2013](#); [Dörnyei & Ryan, 2015](#); [Lamb, 2017](#)). Factors such as cultural beliefs, learning environments, teaching practices, and individual differences in learner characteristics may shape how learner autonomy and motivation interact and influence academic achievement ([Benson, 2013](#); [Lamb, 2017](#); [Ushioda, 2011](#)).

2.3 The ESL Contexts and Its Implications

The context of English as a Second Language (ESL) education presents unique challenges and opportunities for nurturing learner autonomy and fostering motivation. ESL learners often find themselves in immersive language learning environments, where they are exposed to the target language and culture on a daily basis ([Dörnyei & Csizér, 1998](#); [Lamb, 2017](#)).

This immersive context can provide rich opportunities for authentic language use and exposure to diverse cultural experiences, which can potentially enhance learners' integrative motivation and interest in the target language ([Dörnyei & Csizér, 1998](#); [Lamb, 2017](#); [Hossain *et al.*, 2024](#)). However, ESL learners may also face challenges related to cultural adaptation, language barriers, and social integration, which can impact their motivation and autonomy in the learning process ([Dörnyei & Csizér, 1998](#); [Lamb, 2017](#); [Ushioda, 2011](#)).

Furthermore, the ESL classroom often comprises a diverse group of learners with varying linguistic backgrounds, cultural beliefs, and learning preferences, which can present challenges for tailoring pedagogical approaches to nurture learner autonomy and motivation ([Lamb, 2017](#); [Ushioda, 2011](#)). Instructors in ESL contexts must navigate these complexities and adapt their teaching strategies to cater to the diverse needs and characteristics of their learners ([Dörnyei & Csizér, 1998](#); [Lamb, 2017](#)).

Despite these challenges, the ESL context also offers unique opportunities for promoting learner autonomy and motivation. The immersive nature of the learning environment can provide learners with authentic language input and opportunities for self-directed learning outside the classroom ([Benson, 2013](#); [Lamb, 2017](#)). Additionally, the diverse cultural backgrounds and experiences of

ESL learners can foster rich discussions, collaborative learning, and peer support, which can contribute to the development of learner autonomy and motivation (Benson, 2013; Lamb, 2017; Ushioda, 2011).

3. Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

The concept of learner autonomy has gained significant prominence in the field of second language acquisition (SLA) and teaching English as a second language (ESL). It is grounded in the fundamental principle that learners should take an active role in their learning process, exercising control and responsibility over various aspects of their language development (Little, 2007). This section explores the theoretical underpinnings and conceptual frameworks that underpin learner autonomy, its relationship with motivation and academic achievement, and its implications for ESL contexts.

3.1 Theoretical Foundations of Learner Autonomy

The notion of learner autonomy finds its roots in various educational philosophies and theories that emphasize learner-centered approaches and the development of self-regulated learning skills. One of the earliest and most influential contributors to this concept was the educational philosopher John Dewey, who advocated for experiential learning and student-centered education (Dewey, 1938). Dewey's ideas laid the groundwork for recognizing the importance of actively engaging learners in the learning process and fostering their ability to take responsibility for their own growth.

Building on these foundations, the concept of learner autonomy gained traction in the field of language education through the works of scholars such as Henri Holec (1981) and David Little (1991). Holec (1981) defined learner autonomy as "the ability to take charge of one's own learning" (p. 3), encompassing the ability to determine learning objectives, select appropriate methods and techniques, monitor progress, and evaluate outcomes. Little (1991) further expanded on this definition, emphasizing the role of learner autonomy in fostering lifelong learning and the development of transferable skills beyond the classroom setting.

Over the years, various theoretical perspectives have contributed to the understanding of learner autonomy, including constructivism, self-determination theory, and sociocultural theory (Benson, 2011; Dickinson, 1995; Ushioda, 2011). These theories highlight the importance of active engagement, intrinsic motivation, and the social and cultural contexts in which learning takes place, all of which are integral to the development of learner autonomy.

3.2 Dimensions of Learner Autonomy

Learner autonomy is a multidimensional concept that encompasses various aspects of the learning process. Benson (2011) proposed a framework that outlines three key dimensions of learner autonomy: control over learning management, control over cognitive processes, and control over learning content.

Control over learning management: This dimension refers to the learner's ability to make decisions about various organizational and procedural aspects of their learning, such as setting goals, selecting materials, and determining the pace and sequence of their study (Benson, 2011; Cotterall, 1995).

Control over cognitive processes: This dimension involves the learner's capacity to regulate their cognitive processes, including attention, reflection, and metacognitive strategies, to facilitate their language learning (Benson, 2011; Wenden, 1998).

Control over learning content: This dimension relates to the learner's ability to define and negotiate the content of their learning, deciding what to learn and how to prioritize different aspects of language development (Benson, 2011; Nunan, 1997).

These dimensions highlight the multifaceted nature of learner autonomy, encompassing not only the practical aspects of managing the learning process but also the cognitive and metacognitive strategies involved in self-regulated learning (Zimmerman, 1990).

3.3 Learner Autonomy and Motivation

Numerous studies have explored the relationship between learner autonomy and motivation in the context of language learning (Dickinson, 1995; Dörnyei, 2001; Ushioda, 2011). Motivation is a crucial factor in language acquisition, as it determines the learner's level of effort, persistence, and engagement with the learning process (Dörnyei & Ryan, 2015).

Self-determination theory (SDT) (Deci & Ryan, 1985) provides a valuable framework for understanding the link between learner autonomy and motivation. According to SDT, humans have an innate tendency toward growth and self-determination, and when their basic psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness are met, they experience higher levels of intrinsic motivation and well-being (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

In the context of language learning, nurturing learner autonomy can foster a sense of self-determination and intrinsic motivation by providing learners with opportunities to make choices, take ownership of their learning process, and develop a sense of competence (Dörnyei & Ryan, 2015; Ushioda, 2011). When learners feel autonomous and in control of their learning, they are more likely to engage with the material, persist in the face of challenges, and experience a heightened sense of enjoyment and satisfaction (Noels *et al.*, 2000; Spratt *et al.*, 2002).

Furthermore, learner autonomy can contribute to the development of self-regulated learning strategies, which are closely linked to academic achievement (Pintrich, 2000; Zimmerman & Schunk, 2011). Self-regulated learners are proactive in their learning, setting goals, monitoring their progress, and adjusting their strategies as needed (Zimmerman, 2000). By fostering learner autonomy,

educators can equip learners with the skills and mindset necessary for self-regulated learning, ultimately enhancing their academic performance and language proficiency.

3.4 The ESL Contexts and Its Implications

The concept of learner autonomy holds particular significance in the context of teaching English as a second language (ESL). ESL learners often face unique challenges, such as cultural and linguistic barriers, varying educational backgrounds, and diverse learning styles and preferences (Benson, 2001; Little, 2007).

Promoting learner autonomy in ESL classrooms can help address these challenges by empowering learners to take control of their learning process and tailor it to their individual needs and preferences (Benson, 2001; Holec, 1981). By encouraging learners to set their own goals, select relevant materials, and monitor their progress, educators can create an environment that fosters self-directed learning and enhances learners' motivation and engagement (Little, 2007; Nunan, 1997).

Furthermore, the development of learner autonomy is particularly crucial for ESL learners as it equips them with the skills and strategies necessary for lifelong language learning (Little, 2007; Sinclair, 2000). As language learning is an ongoing process that extends beyond the classroom, fostering learner autonomy empowers ESL learners to continue their language development independently, adapting to new contexts and situations as they arise (Little, 2004).

However, it is important to recognize that the implementation of learner autonomy in ESL contexts may present challenges and require careful consideration of cultural and contextual factors (Benson, 2001; Palfreyman & Smith, 2003). Educators must be mindful of the diverse backgrounds and learning preferences of their students, providing appropriate scaffolding and support to facilitate the development of autonomy (Little, 2007; Nunan, 1997).

4. Review of Literature

The interplay between learner autonomy, motivation, and academic achievement has garnered significant attention in the field of second language (L2) acquisition, particularly within English as a Second Language (ESL) contexts. This literature review explores the current research on how nurturing learner autonomy can enhance motivation and academic achievement among L2 learners in ESL settings. The review is structured around three main themes: the conceptualization and importance of learner autonomy, the relationship between autonomy and motivation, and the impact of autonomy on academic achievement. Learner autonomy is defined as the capacity of learners to take charge of their own learning process, including setting goals, selecting learning strategies, and evaluating their progress (Holec, 1981). In the context of L2 learning, autonomy involves self-regulation, metacognitive awareness, and the ability to adapt learning

strategies to various contexts (Little, 2007). Autonomous learners are often more engaged and effective in their learning processes, leading to better outcomes (Benson, 2011).

Research indicates that autonomy is crucial for L2 learners. According to Oxford (2008), autonomous learners are more likely to develop intrinsic motivation, which is essential for sustained language learning. Furthermore, Reinders and White (2011) suggest that fostering autonomy can lead to a more personalized learning experience, catering to individual learner differences and needs. This personalization can enhance engagement and motivation, critical factors in successful language acquisition. The relationship between learner autonomy and motivation is well-documented in the literature. Deci and Ryan's (2000) Self-Determination Theory (SDT) posits that autonomy is one of the fundamental psychological needs that underpin motivation. When learners perceive themselves as autonomous, they are more likely to experience intrinsic motivation, characterized by an inherent interest and enjoyment in the learning activity itself.

Several studies have confirmed this link in ESL contexts. For instance, Ushioda (2011) found that autonomous learning practices, such as self-directed study and goal setting, significantly boost learners' intrinsic motivation. Similarly, Lamb (2017) demonstrated that learners who perceive higher levels of autonomy exhibit stronger motivational orientations and a greater willingness to invest effort in language learning. Moreover, the role of autonomy-supportive teaching practices cannot be overlooked. Teachers who provide opportunities for choice, encourage self-initiation, and acknowledge students' perspectives can significantly enhance learner motivation (Reeve, 2006). In an ESL context, such practices may involve allowing students to choose their reading materials, set personal learning goals, and reflect on their learning progress (Spratt, Humphreys & Chan, 2002). The impact of learner autonomy on academic achievement has been extensively studied, with numerous findings supporting the positive correlation between the two. Autonomy is linked to improved academic outcomes through various mechanisms, including enhanced motivation, better self-regulation, and increased engagement in learning activities (Zimmerman, 2008).

In the context of L2 learning, autonomous learners often achieve higher proficiency levels. For example, a study by Chang (2010) found that L2 learners who engaged in autonomous learning activities, such as self-assessment and independent practice, demonstrated significant improvements in their language proficiency. Similarly, Lee and Heinz (2016) reported that students who exercised greater autonomy in their language learning achieved higher scores on standardized language tests. Furthermore, the integration of technology has been shown to facilitate autonomous learning and improve academic outcomes. Online platforms and digital resources provide learners with access to a wealth of materials and opportunities for self-directed learning (Stockwell, 2013). In their study, Lai and Gu (2011) found that L2 learners who utilized digital tools for

autonomous learning exhibited higher levels of language proficiency and academic achievement. Several factors influence the development of learner autonomy in ESL contexts, including cultural, institutional, and individual differences. Cultural factors play a significant role, as autonomy is perceived and practiced differently across cultures (Littlewood, 1999). In some cultures, the concept of learner autonomy may conflict with traditional teacher-centered educational practices, posing challenges to its implementation (Smith, 2003).

Institutional factors, such as the educational environment and curriculum design, also impact the development of learner autonomy. Schools and universities that promote a learner-centered approach and provide resources for self-directed learning are more likely to foster autonomous learners (Benson, 2001). Additionally, teacher training programs that emphasize the importance of autonomy-supportive teaching practices are crucial for creating an environment conducive to autonomous learning (Borg & Al-Busaidi, 2012). Individual differences, including learners' beliefs, attitudes, and readiness for autonomy, also play a critical role. Research by Spratt, Humphreys and Chan (2002) suggests that learners with a strong sense of self-efficacy and positive attitudes towards autonomous learning are more likely to engage in self-directed activities and achieve better academic outcomes. Moreover, learners' readiness for autonomy, which involves their willingness and ability to take responsibility for their learning, is a key determinant of successful autonomous learning (Cotterall, 2000).

5. Learner Autonomy and Teachers' Ideologies: A Non-native Perspective

Learner autonomy, as defined by Holec (1981), refers to the ability of learners to take charge of their own learning process, encompassing the determination of objectives, content, methods, and evaluation criteria. This concept challenges the traditional teacher-centered approach, placing learners at the forefront of their educational journey. Benson (2011) further emphasizes that learner autonomy involves not only the capacity to take control of learning but also the willingness and proactive attitude to do so.

5.1 The Significance of Learner Autonomy and Teacher Ideologies

Numerous studies have highlighted the positive impact of learner autonomy on L2 acquisition. Ushioda (2011) argues that fostering learner autonomy can enhance intrinsic motivation, a crucial factor in sustained language learning. When learners take ownership of their learning process, they develop a sense of agency and responsibility, leading to increased engagement and perseverance (Little, 2007). Furthermore, Crabbe (1993) suggests that autonomous learners are better equipped to adapt their learning strategies to their individual needs, ultimately improving their language proficiency. While the benefits of learner autonomy are well-documented, its implementation is heavily influenced by teachers' ideologies and beliefs about language teaching and learning. Borg (2003) defines teacher ideology as a belief system that guides teachers' instructional decisions and practices. These ideologies are shaped by various factors, including cultural backgrounds,

educational experiences, and professional training. In the ESL context, teachers' ideologies often reflect the dichotomy between traditional teacher-centered approaches and learner-centered methodologies that emphasize autonomy. Aoki (2002) argues that many non-native English teachers, particularly those from collectivistic cultural backgrounds, may struggle to fully embrace learner autonomy due to deeply ingrained beliefs about the teacher's authoritative role and the passivity of learners.

5.2 Navigating Cultural and Ideological Differences

As a non-native English teacher from a collectivistic culture, I have experienced firsthand the tension between the desire to promote learner autonomy and the deeply rooted cultural norms that emphasize respect for authority and conformity. In my home country, the traditional teacher-centered approach is still widely practiced, with teachers viewed as the primary source of knowledge and learners expected to absorb information passively. However, through my exposure to Western educational philosophies and research on learner autonomy, I have come to recognize the immense value of empowering learners to take an active role in their learning process. This realization has prompted me to reevaluate my own ideologies and teaching practices, leading to a gradual shift towards more learner-centered methodologies. Reconciling the ideological differences between traditional teacher-centered approaches and learner autonomy requires a delicate balancing act. While acknowledging the cultural and educational norms that shape teachers' beliefs, it is crucial to recognize the potential benefits of nurturing learner autonomy in fostering motivation and academic achievement. One practical approach is to introduce learner autonomy gradually, allowing both teachers and learners to adapt to the new paradigm. Nunan (1997) suggests starting with small-scale autonomous activities, such as allowing learners to choose the order of tasks or providing opportunities for self-assessment. This incremental approach can help alleviate potential resistance and create a smoother transition towards more autonomous learning environments. Additionally, professional development programs that focus on raising awareness about learner autonomy and equipping teachers with practical strategies for its implementation can be instrumental in facilitating ideological shifts. Benson (2011) emphasizes the importance of involving teachers in the decision-making process and providing ongoing support and guidance as they navigate the complexities of fostering learner autonomy.

6. Strategies for Nurturing Learner Autonomy

While acknowledging the challenges posed by ideological differences, there are numerous strategies that non-native English teachers can employ to nurture learner autonomy in the ESL context. These strategies not only empower learners but also have the potential to enhance their motivation and academic achievement.

6.1 Goal setting and self-assessment

Involving learners in setting their own learning goals and encouraging self-assessment can cultivate a sense of ownership and responsibility (Nguyen & Gu,

2013). By actively participating in the goal-setting process, learners develop a deeper understanding of their strengths, weaknesses, and learning needs.

6.2 Learner training

Equipping learners with the necessary skills and strategies for autonomous learning is crucial. Learner training programs can focus on developing metacognitive strategies, time management skills, and resource utilization, enabling learners to take control of their learning process (Wenden, 1998).

6.3 Choices and decision-making

Providing learners with choices regarding learning materials, tasks, and assessment methods can foster autonomy and increase motivation (Spratt *et al.*, 2002). When learners have a voice in shaping their learning experience, they are more likely to engage actively and take responsibility for their progress.

6.4 Collaborative learning

Encouraging collaborative learning activities, such as peer feedback, group projects, and discussion forums, can promote autonomy by creating opportunities for learners to share ideas, negotiate meanings, and support one another's learning (Little, 2007).

6.5 Technology integration

Leveraging technology can facilitate autonomous learning by providing learners with access to a wealth of resources and opportunities for self-paced learning (Reinders & White, 2016). Online learning platforms, language learning apps, and virtual communities can empower learners to take charge of their language acquisition journey.

Nurturing learner autonomy in the ESL context is a multifaceted endeavor that requires navigating the complex interplay between teachers' ideologies and the desire to enhance learners' motivation and academic achievement. As a non-native English teacher, reconciling cultural and educational norms with the principles of learner autonomy can be challenging, but it is a journey worth undertaking. By gradually introducing autonomous learning activities, providing professional development opportunities, and employing strategies such as goal setting, learner training, choices, collaborative learning, and technology integration, non-native English teachers can create an environment that fosters learner autonomy while respecting cultural sensitivities.

Ultimately, nurturing learner autonomy is not only about empowering learners but also about acknowledging the transformative potential of language learning. When learners take ownership of their learning process, they develop the skills and confidence necessary to become effective communicators, opening doors to personal growth, academic success, and cross-cultural understanding.

7. Learner Autonomy in the ESL Classroom: Students' Perceptions

The concept of learner autonomy has garnered significant attention in the field of second language acquisition, particularly in the context of enhancing motivation and academic achievement for L2 learners. Nurturing learner autonomy is widely recognized as a crucial factor in fostering intrinsic motivation, self-regulation, and ultimately, successful language learning outcomes (Borg & Al-Busaidi, 2012; Dickinson, 1995). However, the implementation of learner autonomy in the ESL classroom is a multifaceted endeavor, and understanding students' perceptions is paramount in ensuring its effective integration.

In the ESL context, learner autonomy is often viewed as a means of empowering students to take responsibility for their learning, fostering self-directed learning strategies, and nurturing a sense of ownership and control over the language acquisition process (Little, 1991; Sinclair, 2000). It is a fundamental shift from the traditional teacher-centered approach, which positions the learner as an active participant in the learning process.

7.1 Students' Perceptions of Learner Autonomy

While the benefits of promoting learner autonomy are well-documented, its successful implementation hinges on students' perceptions and attitudes towards this approach. Understanding learners' perspectives is crucial, as their beliefs and attitudes can significantly influence their engagement, motivation, and ultimately, their language learning outcomes (Benson, 2001; Cotterall, 1995).

Numerous studies have explored students' perceptions of learner autonomy in the ESL classroom, yielding diverse and sometimes conflicting findings. On one hand, many learners have expressed positive attitudes towards autonomous learning, recognizing its potential to enhance their motivation, self-confidence, and language proficiency (Borg & Al-Busaidi, 2012; Sert, 2006). These students often perceive learner autonomy as an opportunity to take control of their learning, tailor their learning strategies to their individual needs and preferences, and develop a sense of ownership over their language acquisition journey.

On the other hand, some students have exhibited resistance or skepticism towards learner autonomy, citing concerns about their perceived lack of readiness, insufficient language proficiency, or a preference for traditional teacher-led instruction (Aoki & Moloney, 2010; Littlewood, 1999). These learners may view autonomous learning as an overwhelming responsibility or perceive it as a deviation from the familiar and comfortable teacher-centered approach they have experienced throughout their educational careers.

7.2 Cultural and Contextual Influences

Students' perceptions of learner autonomy are often shaped by their cultural backgrounds and educational contexts. In cultures where traditional, teacher-centered pedagogies are deeply ingrained, the shift towards learner autonomy may be met with resistance or apprehension (Littlewood, 1999; Hossain, 2024;

Palfreyman, 2003). Learners from these contexts may perceive autonomous learning as a deviation from the norm and struggle to adapt to the new roles and responsibilities expected of them.

Conversely, learners from cultures that promote individualism and self-directed learning may be more receptive to learner autonomy and perceive it as a natural extension of their educational experiences (Littlewood, 1999; Hossain *et al.*, 2024; Murase, 2015). These learners may feel more comfortable taking control of their learning and may require less scaffolding or guidance in developing autonomous learning strategies.

7.3 Role of Teacher Beliefs and Practices

In addition to students' perceptions, the successful implementation of learner autonomy is also influenced by teachers' beliefs and practices. Teachers who embrace learner autonomy and actively promote it in their classrooms can positively shape students' perceptions and foster a culture of autonomous learning (Borg & Al-Busaidi, 2012; Shahsavari, 2014). These teachers often engage in practices such as providing choices and decision-making opportunities, encouraging self-reflection and goal-setting, and fostering a supportive and collaborative learning environment.

On the other hand, teachers who hold more traditional beliefs about language learning or lack the necessary knowledge and skills to implement learner autonomy may inadvertently hinder its development (Aoki & Moloney, 2010; Borg & Al-Busaidi, 2012). These teachers may continue to employ teacher-centered approaches, limiting opportunities for students to take ownership of their learning and potentially reinforcing negative perceptions of learner autonomy.

8. Learner Autonomy in ESL Classroom: Pragmatic Challenges and Constraints

The concept of learner autonomy has gained significant traction in the field of language education, particularly in the context of teaching English as a Second Language (ESL). Learner autonomy refers to the ability and willingness of learners to take responsibility for their own learning process, including setting goals, selecting resources, and evaluating their progress (Benson, 2011). The promotion of learner autonomy is widely recognized as a crucial factor in enhancing learners' motivation, engagement, and academic achievement (Little, 2007). However, despite its theoretical appeal, the implementation of learner autonomy in ESL classrooms often faces pragmatic challenges and constraints that must be addressed.

One of the primary challenges in fostering learner autonomy in ESL classrooms is the deeply ingrained cultural and educational traditions that may conflict with the principles of autonomous learning. In many contexts, learners have been conditioned to rely heavily on teacher-centered approaches, where the teacher is perceived as the sole authority and the primary source of knowledge

(Borg & Al-Busaidi, 2012). This cultural conditioning can make it difficult for learners to embrace the notion of taking responsibility for their own learning and actively participating in decision-making processes (Lamb, 2008). ESL teachers must be mindful of these cultural barriers and work towards gradually shifting learners' mindsets and fostering a more collaborative and student-centered learning environment.

Another significant challenge lies in the limited proficiency levels of ESL learners, particularly in the early stages of language acquisition. Learners with low English proficiency may struggle to understand instructions, communicate their needs, and navigate resources effectively, which can hinder their ability to exercise autonomy (Reinders & Hubbard, 2013). In such cases, teachers need to provide scaffolding and support to help learners develop the necessary language skills and strategies to become more autonomous over time (Cotterall, 2000).

Furthermore, the lack of appropriate resources and learning materials tailored to promoting learner autonomy can pose a significant obstacle. Many traditional ESL textbooks and curricula are designed with a teacher-centered approach, leaving little room for learners to take control of their learning journey (Murase, 2015). Teachers may need to invest substantial time and effort in creating or adapting materials that facilitate learner autonomy, such as self-assessment tools, learning portfolios, and project-based activities (Dam, 2011).

Time constraints and large class sizes can also impede the implementation of learner autonomy in ESL classrooms. In many educational settings, teachers face the pressure of covering a vast curriculum within a limited timeframe, leaving little room for learner-centered activities and individualized support (Benson, 2013). Additionally, large class sizes can make it challenging for teachers to provide personalized guidance and monitor each learner's progress effectively (Sheerin, 1997).

Another pragmatic constraint relates to the assessment practices commonly employed in ESL contexts. Standardized tests and high-stakes exams often prioritize specific language skills and content knowledge, potentially discouraging learners from pursuing autonomous learning paths that deviate from the prescribed curriculum (Murase, 2015). Teachers may need to find creative ways to align autonomous learning activities with assessment requirements or advocate for more flexible and learner-centered assessment methods (Sinclair, 2000).

Despite these challenges and constraints, fostering learner autonomy in ESL classrooms remains a worthwhile endeavor with numerous potential benefits. Autonomous learners are more likely to develop intrinsic motivation, self-regulation skills, and a deeper understanding of the language learning process (Ushioda, 2011). Additionally, autonomous learning aligns with the principles of lifelong learning, equipping learners with the abilities to continue their language development beyond the classroom setting (Benson, 2011).

To overcome the pragmatic challenges and constraints, a multi-faceted approach is required. First, it is essential to raise awareness among learners, teachers, and educational stakeholders about the importance and benefits of learner autonomy (Little, 2007). This can be achieved through professional development programs, workshops, and open dialogues that address cultural and pedagogical concerns.

Second, teacher training programs should emphasize the development of autonomy-supportive teaching strategies and provide practical guidance on creating learner-centered materials and activities (Borg & Al-Busaidi, 2012). Teachers should be equipped with the necessary skills to scaffold learners' autonomy development and foster a collaborative learning environment.

Third, educational institutions and policymakers should consider revising curricula, assessment practices, and resource allocation to better support the implementation of learner autonomy (Murase, 2015). This may involve incorporating more flexible and learner-centered assessment methods, providing access to diverse learning resources, and allocating time and resources for autonomous learning activities.

Fourth, the integration of technology can play a vital role in facilitating learner autonomy in ESL classrooms. Online platforms, mobile applications, and virtual learning environments can provide learners with access to a wealth of resources, opportunities for self-paced learning, and avenues for collaboration and peer support (Reinders & Hubbard, 2013).

Finally, it is crucial to involve learners as active participants in the process of promoting learner autonomy. By encouraging learners to reflect on their learning preferences, goals, and strategies, teachers can foster a sense of ownership and responsibility (Cotterall, 2000). Learners should be given opportunities to make choices, set personalized learning goals, and engage in self-assessment and self-regulation activities.

In conclusion, while the implementation of learner autonomy in ESL classrooms faces pragmatic challenges and constraints, addressing these issues is critical for enhancing learners' motivation, engagement, and academic achievement. By raising awareness, providing appropriate teacher training, revising curricula and assessment practices, integrating technology, and actively involving learners, educational institutions can create an environment conducive to the development of autonomous learning skills. Ultimately, nurturing learner autonomy is an investment in equipping ESL learners with the tools and mindset necessary for lifelong language learning and personal growth.

9. Conclusion

The pursuit of nurturing learner autonomy has emerged as a pivotal endeavor in the realm of second language (L2) education, particularly within the contexts of English as a Second Language (ESL). This review has delved into the multifaceted

relationship between learner autonomy, motivation, and academic achievement, unveiling insights that hold profound implications for pedagogical practices and curriculum design. Fostering learner autonomy is not merely a means to an end but a transformative process that empowers students to take ownership of their learning journey. By cultivating a sense of responsibility, self-regulation, and metacognitive awareness, autonomous learners develop an intrinsic motivation that transcends the confines of the classroom. This intrinsic drive propels them to persist through challenges, embrace setbacks as opportunities for growth, and actively seek out resources that align with their individualized learning needs. The findings of this review resoundingly underscore the positive correlation between learner autonomy and heightened motivation levels. As students assume greater control over their learning endeavors, they experience a heightened sense of agency and purpose, fueling their determination to excel. This intrinsic motivation acts as a potent catalyst, igniting a virtuous cycle in which learners become more engaged, invested, and driven to achieve their academic goals.

However, nurturing learner autonomy is a multifaceted and nuanced undertaking that necessitates a comprehensive approach. Merely providing learners with choices and resources is insufficient; instead, educators must actively scaffold the development of autonomy-supporting strategies and cultivate an environment that fosters self-directed learning. This involves equipping learners with the requisite metacognitive skills, such as goal-setting, self-monitoring, and self-evaluation, while simultaneously fostering a classroom climate that values student voice, encourages risk-taking, and promotes a growth mindset. Crucially, the role of the teacher in this process cannot be understated. Teachers must undergo a paradigm shift, transitioning from being the sole authority figure to becoming facilitators and co-creators of knowledge. By embracing a learner-centered approach, teachers can guide students in navigating their autonomous learning trajectories, providing timely feedback, and tailoring instructional strategies to cater to diverse learning preferences and needs.

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