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Learner autonomy

in a distance language learning/teaching context

Навчальна автономія в аспекті дистанційного викладання/вивчення іноземної мови. Дана робота присвячена аналізу точок зору, пов'язаних з проблемою автономії слухачів дистанційного навчання. Метою та завданням роботи є визначення оптимальних способів та механізмів втілення концепції автономії слухачів для забезпечення максимально ефективного та комфортного процесу вивчення іноземної мови.

Ключові слова: навчальна автономія, дистанційне навчання, іноземна мова, викладач.

The paper analyses different points of view which deal with the problem of learner autonomy in the distance foreign language learning context. The objective of the research is to determine optimum methods and fine-drawn mechanisms of learner autonomy for providing the most effective process of foreign language learning.

Keywords: learner autonomy, distance learning, foreign language, teacher.

Since 2020, virtual learning or learning/teaching at a distance has become priority-number-one issue in the education environment all around the world. Such a time calls for learner autonomy that needs to come from within but not be imposed by teachers. The research deals with defining the means and techniques of learner autonomy implementation for providing the most efficient process of

foreign language learning/teaching. The topicality of the research is based on the fact that the problem mentioned above is being discussed so far. Moreover, there is no consensus about the means that provide the right balance between learner autonomy, independence, and control.

Interrelation of autonomy, independence, and control is one of the key topics in scientific literature about learner autonomy as a factor of the learning process in distance education.

Distance foreign language learning sets new requirements for students and at the same time enables them to make an independent choice as a part of suggested course. Distance learners are active participants of educational process, and they take decisions by themselves. So, students should take responsibility for their own learning and control over their learning. Distance learning on its own doesn't create conditions for learner autonomy. The interpretation of learner autonomy is closely connected with such notions as control, independence, and cooperation (joint control).

The idea of learner independence as the main aim for distance learning is widely criticized [1]. The main argument here is that the idea of independence as the purpose in distance learning is seldom in balance with learner support and assistance in their problem-solving process. Control concept was worked out for better understanding of distance learners' needs and demands. According to this idea, control is not the form of self-study that includes the use of any external assistance or resources. On the contrary, for providing control learners need to have certain freedom to research and make their choice. Moreover, students require sufficient competence for fulfilling the tasks and the use of support. Learners' control in the framework of this idea is defined as the result of the balance for three main elements: independence, competence, and assistance.

Speaking about the balance of autonomy and control, the researchers conclude that distance learner autonomy develops by means of the joint control of the learning process. The context of joint control is based on the idea that cognitive autonomy is mostly the responsibility of any learner but at the same time this autonomy is not equal to social independence. So, students must have the

chance to control the fulfilling the tasks through the cooperation with other learners and a teacher. The joint control over digesting the material is defined as the central element to provide learner autonomy.

There exist two models that help students develop their ability to autonomy in the framework of distance learning while mastering a foreign language [2, p.106-115]. The first model shows the approach for learners' preparation through the target development of the course. The second model is aimed at stimulating learners to expand their subject framework that is studied by means of active use of language resources out of the classroom. In such a case students can make their own choice in the educational process. These two models represent two basic components of autonomy – preparation of learners and their involving in the process of study.

It is noteworthy that in terms of integration of Ukrainian Higher Education into European Higher Education Area, learner autonomy should be provided by combination of learner independence and joint control. In each specific case the importance of any of these two elements or the balance between them shows broader philosophic approaches to interrelations of distance learning and teaching. Such factors as the number of learners, their access to the newest technology, and characteristics of participants of the educational process influence the balance between learner independence and joint control.

References

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