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ENHANCING LEARNER AUTONOMY IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNING AMONG NON-PHILOLOGICAL UNIVERSITY STUDENTS IN DIGITAL ENVIRONMENTS

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Abstract

The rapid development of digital technologies has significantly transformed the ways in which university students access, process, and use educational information. In English language education, digital environments provide learners with opportunities to study independently, select appropriate learning resources, monitor their progress, and organize their learning according to individual needs. However, the availability of digital resources does not automatically result in learner autonomy. Students require appropriate pedagogical guidance and structured learning strategies to use digital technologies effectively for independent language learning. This article examines the role of digital learning environments in enhancing learner autonomy among non-philological university students studying English. Particular attention is given to goal setting, learning planning, self-monitoring, self-assessment, and the responsible selection of digital resources. The study discusses methodological approaches that can be incorporated into English language instruction to gradually increase students' responsibility for their own learning. The analysis suggests that a combination of teacher guidance, learner choice, reflective activities, digital resources, and continuous self-assessment can create favorable conditions for the development of learner autonomy. The article concludes that digital technologies should not replace pedagogical support but should function as tools that facilitate students' active participation and responsibility in the English learning process.

Keywords: learner autonomy, English language learning, non-philological students, digital environment, independent learning, self-assessment, digital learning tools.

Introduction

The digital transformation of higher education has considerably changed the organization of teaching and learning processes. Digital platforms, mobile applications, online resources, multimedia materials, and other technology-mediated tools have created new opportunities for university students to access educational content beyond the traditional classroom. In English language learning, these developments are particularly significant because learners can interact with authentic materials, practice different language skills, receive immediate feedback, and organize their learning according to their individual needs and interests. Recent research has emphasized that technology can create opportunities for more autonomous forms of language learning when learners are supported in making meaningful decisions about their learning processes.

Learner autonomy has become an important concept in contemporary language education. It generally refers to learners' ability and willingness to take responsibility for different aspects of their learning [1]. Autonomous learners are expected to participate actively in setting learning goals, selecting strategies and resources, monitoring their progress, and evaluating learning outcomes [2]. Therefore, autonomy should not be understood simply as learning without a teacher. Rather, it involves the gradual development of learners' capacity to make informed decisions and regulate their own learning [5].

The development of learner autonomy is particularly relevant for students of non-philological university programmes. Unlike students specializing in foreign languages, non-philological students

usually study English as an additional academic or professional subject alongside their main specialization. Their future professional activities may require them to use English independently for accessing information, communicating with international colleagues, reading professional literature, or developing their professional knowledge. Consequently, the ability to continue learning English independently can become an important component of their academic and professional development [8]. Digital environments can provide favorable conditions for this process. Students can use online dictionaries, educational videos, electronic texts, language-learning applications, learning management systems, digital portfolios, and other resources to support their English learning [13]. Nevertheless, access to a large number of digital resources does not necessarily mean that students are autonomous learners. Research has shown that learners may use technology for language learning unevenly and that appropriate teacher guidance remains important for helping students benefit from technology-enhanced learning [6].

Another important issue is the methodological organization of digital learning. If students are simply instructed to "study English online," they may lack clear objectives, appropriate strategies, and mechanisms for evaluating their progress. Therefore, digital learning activities should be intentionally designed to develop students' responsibility and self-regulation [11]. Such activities may include individual learning plans, digital learning diaries, self-assessment tasks, reflective activities, project work, online discussions, and structured use of digital resources [12]. Recent research also indicates growing interest in the relationship between artificial intelligence, digital technologies, self-regulation, and learner autonomy in university EFL contexts. For example, recent studies have examined how AI-supported and technology-mediated learning can influence students' self-regulation and autonomous learning behaviors [15]. This development further increases the need for methodological approaches that teach students not only how to use digital tools but also how to use them purposefully and critically [4].

Thus, the purpose of this article is to examine methodological approaches to enhancing learner autonomy in English language learning among non-philological university students in digital environments. The article focuses on the pedagogical conditions and learning activities that can help students gradually develop responsibility for planning, monitoring, and evaluating their own English learning [12].

Literature review

Learner autonomy has been extensively discussed in the field of foreign language education. One of the foundational scholars associated with this concept is Henri Holec, who conceptualized learner autonomy as the ability of learners to take charge of their own learning [5]. This perspective emphasizes that learners should gradually develop the capacity to make decisions concerning learning objectives, content, methods, pace, resources, and evaluation. Importantly, autonomy is not equivalent to learning without a teacher; rather, it represents the development of the learner's capacity to make informed decisions about the learning process.

David Little further developed the concept by emphasizing the learner's ability to plan, implement, monitor, and evaluate learning [7]. From this perspective, autonomous language learning is closely connected with reflection and learner agency. Students are expected not simply to complete assigned activities but to understand why they are performing particular tasks, select appropriate strategies, monitor their progress, and reflect on the effectiveness of their learning approaches. Benson's work also contributed significantly to the theoretical development of learner autonomy in language education. His research emphasizes the multidimensional nature of autonomy and its relationship with learners' ability to exercise control over different aspects of their learning [1]. The concept therefore extends beyond independent task completion and includes cognitive, metacognitive, motivational, and behavioral dimensions.

The development of digital technologies has expanded the practical possibilities for learner autonomy. Digital environments provide learners with access to a wide range of materials, including online dictionaries, electronic books, educational videos, language-learning applications, learning management systems, interactive exercises, and communication platforms [13]. These resources allow students to continue learning beyond the physical classroom and to select materials according to their individual learning needs. However, access to technology does not automatically produce autonomous learners. Learners need appropriate strategies and pedagogical support to use digital resources effectively. Recent research has highlighted the relationship between digital technology, self-regulation, and learner autonomy, suggesting that technology can support goal-setting, monitoring, reflection, and independent learning when its use is methodologically organized [6].

This issue is particularly important in non-philological higher education. Students majoring in engineering, economics, management, information technology, and other professional fields may have limited classroom time for English. At the same time, their future professional activities may require continuous engagement with English-language information and resources. Consequently, developing the ability to learn English independently can contribute not only to their language proficiency but also to their long-term academic and professional development [2]. Recent studies in the Uzbek higher education context have also drawn attention to self-directed learning and digital learning environments. Research has examined the development of independent learning activities through electronic environments and emphasized the importance of reflective activities, digital resources, learning analytics, and teacher support. Other recent research has specifically considered self-directed learning among EFL university students in Uzbekistan, highlighting metacognitive regulation, digital tool use, and self-organization as important components of autonomous learning.

Therefore, the literature suggests that effective development of learner autonomy requires a combination of learner responsibility, structured pedagogical support, reflective practice, and purposeful use of digital resources [12]. For non-philological university students, this combination can provide an appropriate foundation for integrating English learning into their broader academic and professional development.

Methodology

The present study employs a qualitative and descriptive methodological approach to examine ways of enhancing learner autonomy in English language learning among non-philological university students in digital environments. The methodological framework is based on the analysis of theoretical literature on learner autonomy, self-directed learning, self-regulated learning, and technology-enhanced language education. The study focuses on the pedagogical relationship between digital learning resources and the development of students' responsibility for their own learning. Particular attention is given to five interconnected components of autonomous English learning: goal setting, learning planning, resource selection, self-monitoring, and self-assessment.

The proposed methodological framework consists of four interconnected stages.

Stage 1: Goal setting.

At the initial stage, students identify their individual English learning needs and formulate specific short-term and long-term learning goals. Teachers can support this process by providing examples of realistic objectives and helping students connect their English learning goals with their academic or professional needs. Digital platforms can be used to record and monitor individual objectives.

Stage 2: Learning planning and resource selection.

At this stage, students develop individual learning plans and select appropriate digital resources. Instead of assigning identical materials to all learners, teachers can provide a range of resources and teach students how to select materials according to their language level, learning objectives, and

professional interests. Possible resources include digital texts, videos, online dictionaries, interactive exercises, electronic learning platforms, and other educational materials.

Stage 3: Self-monitoring and reflection.

Students regularly monitor their learning activities and reflect on their progress. Digital learning diaries, checklists, progress trackers, and electronic portfolios can be incorporated into this stage. Learners record completed activities, identify difficulties, and determine which learning strategies have been effective or ineffective. This stage is important because autonomous learning requires not only independent action but also the ability to reflect critically on the learning process.

Stage 4: Self-assessment and adjustment.

The final stage involves evaluating learning outcomes and modifying individual learning plans. Students assess their progress using self-assessment checklists, quizzes, portfolio evidence, and teacher feedback. Based on the results, learners identify areas requiring additional practice and adjust their future learning objectives and strategies.

The teacher's role remains important throughout all four stages. Rather than completely transferring responsibility to students, the teacher functions as a facilitator, adviser, and provider of methodological support. This approach is consistent with the view that autonomy develops gradually and that learners may require guidance and training before they can effectively manage different aspects of their learning. Digital technologies are therefore treated not as an independent solution but as instruments that facilitate autonomous learning. Their pedagogical value depends on how effectively they are integrated into learning objectives, reflective activities, assessment procedures, and teacher support. Recent research similarly indicates that technology-mediated learning can support self-regulation and learner autonomy when students are encouraged to use digital tools purposefully rather than simply consume digital content.

Results and discussion

The analysis of theoretical and methodological literature indicates that the development of learner autonomy in digital environments requires a systematic pedagogical framework rather than the simple introduction of digital technologies into the English language classroom [12]. On the basis of the reviewed approaches, a four-stage methodological model can be proposed for non-philological university students: goal setting, learning planning and resource selection, self-monitoring and reflection, and self-assessment and adjustment.

The first stage, **goal setting**, is aimed at helping students understand their individual language-learning needs. Non-philological students often have different reasons for learning English depending on their academic specialization and future professional requirements. Therefore, learning objectives should be connected with students' academic and professional contexts [2]. For example, an engineering student may need English for reading technical documentation, while a management student may require English for professional communication and accessing international sources. Digital tools can support this process by allowing students to record their objectives and regularly review their progress.

The second stage, **learning planning and resource selection**, focuses on developing students' ability to organize their independent learning. At this stage, students can create weekly or monthly learning plans that include specific activities related to vocabulary, reading, listening, speaking, and writing. Teachers can provide several digital resources and explain how to evaluate their relevance and reliability [4]. Students then make informed choices instead of relying exclusively on materials selected by the teacher. Such an approach gradually increases students' responsibility for their own learning.

The third stage, **self-monitoring and reflection**, is essential for transforming independent activity into autonomous learning. Students should regularly consider what they have learned, which difficulties they have experienced, and which strategies have been effective. Digital learning diaries, electronic portfolios, progress trackers, and reflective questionnaires can be used for this purpose [9]. For example,

after completing a listening activity, a student may record the main difficulty encountered, the strategy used to overcome it, and the aspect that requires further practice. This type of reflection encourages metacognitive awareness and helps learners become more conscious of their learning processes.

The fourth stage, **self-assessment and adjustment**, enables students to evaluate their progress and modify their learning plans. Self-assessment can be conducted through online quizzes, checklists, digital portfolios, learning journals, and teacher-supported reflection [8]. Instead of viewing assessment only as a final measurement of achievement, students can use assessment information to identify their strengths and areas for improvement. Consequently, assessment becomes an instrument for further learning.

The proposed model can be represented as follows:

Stage	Main student activity	Possible digital tools	Expected outcome
1. Goal setting	Identifying needs and setting objectives	Digital planners, learning platforms	Clear individual learning goals
2. Planning and resource selection	Creating a learning plan and selecting materials	Online courses, videos, e-books, dictionaries	Better organization of independent learning
3. Self-monitoring and reflection	Recording progress and reflecting on difficulties	Digital diaries, portfolios, progress trackers	Increased metacognitive awareness
4. Self-assessment and adjustment	Evaluating results and changing learning strategies	Online quizzes, checklists, e-portfolios	Greater responsibility for future learning

An important finding from the analysis is that the teacher's role does not disappear in an autonomous digital learning environment. Instead, it changes from being primarily a transmitter of information to being a facilitator and methodological adviser. Teachers can help students formulate realistic goals, demonstrate strategies for selecting digital resources, provide feedback, and encourage reflection. This gradual transfer of responsibility is particularly important for learners who have limited previous experience with autonomous learning.

Another important consideration is the distinction between **digital activity and autonomous learning**. A student may spend considerable time using digital resources without actually managing their learning. Watching videos, completing online exercises, or using language applications can constitute independent activity, but autonomy involves a higher level of responsibility: the learner determines objectives, selects appropriate strategies, monitors progress, evaluates outcomes, and makes subsequent decisions. Therefore, digital tools should be integrated into a pedagogical framework that promotes these processes.

For non-philological university students, professional relevance can further strengthen autonomous learning. English tasks can be connected with students' specialization through authentic digital materials. Students can, for example, read professional articles, watch field-related lectures, create terminology lists, prepare short presentations, or participate in online discussions related to their academic field. Such activities can increase the perceived usefulness of English and encourage students to continue learning beyond classroom requirements [10].

The proposed framework also suggests that learner autonomy should be developed gradually. At the beginning, students may require considerable teacher guidance. As they become more familiar with goal setting, planning, monitoring, and self-assessment, teachers can gradually reduce the amount of direct control and increase opportunities for learner choice [3]. In this sense, autonomy should be regarded as a developmental process rather than a fixed learner characteristic. The findings are consistent with previous research emphasizing the importance of learner responsibility, reflection, self-regulation, and appropriate technological support in autonomous language learning [11]. Digital

environments can expand opportunities for autonomous learning, but their effectiveness depends largely on the pedagogical conditions in which they are used. Therefore, successful digital learning requires an appropriate balance between learner independence and teacher support.

Overall, the proposed methodological model demonstrates that digital technologies can contribute to the development of learner autonomy when they are purposefully integrated into the English language learning process. For non-philological university students, the combination of individualized goals, structured learning plans, reflective activities, digital resources, and continuous self-assessment can create favorable conditions for developing the ability to manage English learning independently [7].

Conclusion

The development of learner autonomy is becoming increasingly important in contemporary English language education, particularly in the context of digital transformation in higher education. For non-philological university students, the ability to organize and continue English language learning independently can contribute significantly to their academic and future professional development. The analysis presented in this article demonstrates that digital technologies can create favorable conditions for developing learner autonomy when they are integrated into a systematic pedagogical framework. The availability of online resources alone, however, is insufficient to ensure autonomous learning. Students need to develop the ability to establish learning goals, plan their activities, select appropriate resources, monitor their progress, reflect on their learning experiences, and evaluate their results.

The proposed four-stage methodological model—goal setting, learning planning and resource selection, self-monitoring and reflection, and self-assessment and adjustment—provides a structured approach to gradually developing these abilities. The model also emphasizes the importance of connecting English learning with students' academic specializations and professional needs. The teacher continues to play an important role in this process. Rather than completely transferring responsibility to students, teachers should provide appropriate guidance and gradually encourage students to make independent decisions. Digital tools should consequently be viewed as instruments that support learner autonomy rather than as replacements for pedagogical interaction. For non-philological university students, the integration of professional content, authentic digital materials, reflective activities, and self-assessment can make independent English learning more meaningful and purposeful. Such an approach can help learners develop not only their language competence but also the skills necessary for lifelong learning.

In conclusion, learner autonomy in digital English language learning should be regarded as a gradual and supported process. A carefully designed combination of learner responsibility, teacher facilitation, digital resources, reflection, and self-assessment can provide a sustainable foundation for autonomous language learning in higher education.

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