

## Status of Autonomous Learning Based on Vocational Foreign Language Teaching

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**Abstract:** Since 1960s, with development of cognitive psychology and humanistic psychology in foreign educational fields, some western educational scholars have advocated to cultivate their learning responsibility as learners' ultimate goal of education. What is '*Autonomous Learning*'? It is called self-access language learning, which is a modern learning concept based on humanistic psychology and cognitive psychology, which is also those applied linguistics scholars' important research field and core topic.

**Keywords:** cognitive psychology, autonomous learning, humanistic psychology, self-reliance, Self-access

### 1. External Development Background and Research Status of Autonomous Learning

Sheerin, the proposer of theory of autonomous learning center, pointed out that learning center is a language learning environment with a variety of learning strategies and theories, which could provide a good environment and material conditions for learners to develop their autonomous learning ability. That is to say, it is able to meet their personalized requirements. According to their own characteristics, learners could choose their own way whenever perfect to learn at their own pace. This mode has broken the traditional mode of classroom teaching, no longer limited within fixed time in stable location in stable way of learning. Thus, learners could be entirely at their own pace for learning and summarizing to made up the shortcomings of individual difference demands. It could be better to digest and absorb materials and knowledge, in order to achieve unexpected effect.

The discussion about autonomous learning in language teaching dated with the mid 1970s. And the real introduction of this theory is from Henri Holec. Since 1980s, Holec, formally put forward the concept of learner autonomy. Then more and more researchers did research in this field. Subsequently he published "*Autonomy and Foreign Language Learning*", to demonstrate concept and practical tests about independent learning. After that, more and more foreign scholars showed their great enthusiasm for independent learning research. In the late 1980s, this theoretical research has yielded fruitful results. The diversity of autonomous learning center to a certain extent determines their different projects. Sheerin described many similar projects in his article "Self-access", and relevant theories of autonomous learning center, such as management, science and technology as well as the center guidance.[2]

Mar-Molinero and Wright (1993) introduced in details the central structure and resource integration of language learning in the University of Cape Town, UK, and integrated this opening form into language teaching. Although this learning mode has broken away the traditions with some

innovative significance, there are still many deficiencies and limitations in the independent learning itself.

Riley (1995) pointed out that even though the researchers have fully got the theory and concept of autonomous learning. In a certain area, they have carried out empirical study to prove its validity, autonomous learning itself still has many limitations and problems, such as inappropriate selection and incomplete evaluation system. So it is hard to track the status and characteristics of individual autonomous learning or problems of institutions themselves, which could lead to autonomous learning system implemented.

In general in 1980s, researchers focused on definition and concept of independent learning, as well as the practical aspects of how to cultivate the independent learning ability of language learners. But since 1990s, on basis of more and more study of autonomous learning theory, they tried to promote language learning from various different levels such as political, cultural and psychological, emphasizing on learners' autonomous social learning and cooperative learning mode. At the same time, they still continued to develop and implement strategies research. Since the beginning of the 21st century, the theory and practice of independent learning have developed to maturation, and the theory of independent learning has been fully applied to the field of foreign language research, which achieved fruitful results.

## **2. Internal Development Background and Research Status of Autonomous Learning**

China has been advocating independent learning since ancient times. The history of China is extensive and profound with historical ancient culture. The outstanding culture has contained rich connotations of independent learning. Jiuyuan LU, a philosopher of Southern Song Dynasty, emphasized that learning should be self-reliant and self-access according to the old sayings of "Tao is not from the outside". Learners should have their own unique opinions and should not blindly follow others. They should be truly independent of learning to achieve their desired positive learning effect. Zai ZHANG, a thinker and educator of Northern Song Dynasty, stressed the importance of establishing learning goals. It can be seen that ancient Chinese thinkers and educators have initially recognized the importance of self-reliance and self-learning.

By the end of 1970s, influenced by various theories abroad, some domestic scholars had payed attention to theoretical and practical research on autonomous learning. Many educators, thinkers and scholars have studied and innovated autonomous learning from aspects of definition, characteristics, core connotation and psychological factors, among which Yong WANG, Qi DONG and Yongsu LI are the most representative[3]].

However, the real research on autonomous language learning in China started from the mid of 1980s. In addition, the research at this stage was initial, which focused in introduction and commenting on foreign research results as well as how to promote learners' autonomous learning in combination with China's actual situation. Such a large number of research contents have provided various of thoughts for future development of independent language learning in China, which laid a foundation for later theoretical research and practical teaching.

By 1990s, foreign language teaching community generally recognized the theory of autonomous learning and actively carried out practices. A lot of schools and colleges have carried out relevant teaching reform and practical innovation activities, such as the education reform experiment of *"Discussion on Theory and Practice of Students' Subjective Education"* in Shijiazhuang city, Hebei province, as well as *"A Study on the Guiding Strategy of Classroom Teaching Based on Autonomous*

*Learning*” of Jiangsu Vocational Institute of Commerce”, and “A survey of students' active participation in foreign language classroom teaching and teaching mode” of Nanjing Educational Institute of Jiangsu province. All of these researches have provided effective theoretical foundation and empirical experience for further study of autonomous learning.

By the 21st century, the theory of autonomous learning has become an important research hotspot in the field of foreign language research and a new development trend in China. It is also mainstream of English teaching reform. Both from the perspective of theoretical discussion and empirical research, a new situation of continuous improvement and innovation has emerged. During this period, many researchers and scholars published monographs and a large number of articles in academic journals at home and abroad. Weiguo PANG said: “if students can consciously choose and control their learning motivation, content, strategies, time, environment, evaluation and other aspects, their learning is independent, which has become an important reference for domestic autonomous learning research.” At this times, most of the research results are no longer staying on the theoretical study but on fully understanding the theory of autonomous learning on the basis of results of empirical study with data. Therefore, it has epoch-making significance for China's foreign language learners. Domestic empirical studies have found that: autonomous learning ability has a predictive effect on academic progress and learning achievement, both of which are in a positive relationship; autonomous learning is the guarantee of developing students' abilities, and it is of great significance to tap the potential of learning, to cultivate the spirit of innovation, and to form the thought of independent learning and lifelong learning.[1]

With the development of new times, a great progress has been made in the research of independent foreign language learning in China. However, compared with foreign research circles, the domestic started relatively late and developed slowly with few monographs on achievements and immature practice verification. Therefore, the research still has a long way to go in the future. Foreign scholars have extended their research into all aspects, while the current domestic research still focuses on the introduction of foreign results and on the cultivation methods of independent learning ability in the domestic environment and exploration in practice in all. Many studies have not been carried out, such as the subjective and objective factors restricting independent learning, the cultivation of independent learning ability in language skills training, the relationship between cultivation and scores, as well as the cultivation of autonomous learning ability outside the classroom. The methods of how to cultivate autonomous learning ability have been discussed from different angles by scholars, such as Lianzhen HE, Fei XIAO, Yuyan WEI, who have put forward some good suggestions and specific practices, but a mode that can effectively guide the practice of cultivating independent learning ability has not been formed.

### **Summary**

All in all, research objects of domestic are mostly concentrated in mixed groups, such as primary and secondary school and non-English major college students, while the research on groups of vocational colleges is not much and not in-depth enough. For aspects of content, the domestic research mainly focuses on the introduction of foreign achievements into domestic environment, rather than innovation of foreign language autonomous learning with the progress and development of society and information technology. Additionally, domestic research is mainly based on speculative research, and supplemented by empirical research. Empirical research on English independent learning in vocational colleges is even less, which provides broader development space and more limited opportunities for the

subject.

Under the circumstances of informatization, English autonomous learning ability training strategy should be studied to apply to the future of higher vocational English teaching, in order to inspire and guide students well to get unexpected teaching effect.

### **References**

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