

# A Study on College Students' Learner Autonomy in English Listening

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**Abstract :** Since the College English Curriculum Requirements was enacted, two main objectives have been prescribed for college English teaching. One objective is to develop students' abilities to use English, especially in listening and speaking. The other objective is to improve their abilities of autonomous learning. Obviously, it is important to cultivate students' abilities of autonomous learning, especially the ability of listening autonomous learning. Based on the concept of autonomous learning, this paper aims at discussing how to cultivate students' autonomous learning ability and improve the students' English listening level.

**Keywords:** English Listening; Learner Autonomy; Solutions

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## 1. Introduction

Since the definition of learner autonomy was first raised by Henri Holec in 1981, it has aroused heated discussion among researchers in this field. In the last two decades, many people have studied the learner autonomy. Listening is one of the basic language skills. It plays an important role in learning English as a second language can never be undermined, especially in china.

English listening learning is a long-term learning habit. Due to the limitation of class time and curriculum arrangement, it is impossible for listening learners to improve their listening level completely by classroom teaching. So students should become autonomous learners, in order to adapt to the development of the science and technology, utmost to master the new knowledge.

## 2. Learner Autonomy and Listening Comprehension

### 2.1 Studies about Learner Autonomy

Autonomy has aroused a heated topic for language learning in the western countries over the last few decades. It is difficult to define the concepts of autonomy because different people have different ideas about the concepts. Kind of terms are used by a lot of scholars such as "independent learning", "learner autonomy", "self-instruction" "self-direction", "self-access", etc.

It was in the middle of 1970s that linguists abroad began to probe into the field of learner autonomy in foreign language teaching and learning (Gao Jili, 2005)<sup>[1]</sup>. In 1981, Holec (1981:3) raised the definition in his monograph *Autonomy and Foreign Language Learning*, he defines autonomy as "the ability to take charge of one's own learning"<sup>[2]</sup>. From then on, a great number of researches appeared and got great achievement in theoretical studies. Dickinson (1987:11) accepts the definition of autonomy as "a situation in which the learner is totally responsible for all of the decisions concerned with his or her learning and the implementation of those decisions"<sup>[3]</sup>. Little (1990:7) considers learner autonomy as "essentially a matter of the learner's psychological relation to the process and content of learning"<sup>[4]</sup>. Kenny (1993:436) states that autonomy is "the opportunity to become a person"<sup>[5]</sup>. Bound (1988:17) suggests that autonomy is "an approach to educational practice"<sup>[6]</sup>.

In general, western researches focus on the concept of autonomous learning and how to cultivate learner autonomy. These works discuss the theoretical background of learner autonomy in detail and analyze each factor that affects learner autonomy clearly, such as attitude, belief, strategy and role, and analyze how to promote learner autonomy in practice (Xu Jinfen, 2007)<sup>[7]</sup>.

### 2.2 Studies about Listening Comprehension

Any study related to listening needs a comprehensive understanding of what listening is. Hence, it is necessary to describe it. The definition of listening comprehension has been developed since the early 20th century. In the early 20th, it was defined in terms of reliably recording acoustic signals in the brain. Listening comprehension refers to the process of understanding speech in a second or foreign language and it includes both top-down processing and bottom-up processing. "Listening comprehension is viewed theoretically as an active process in which individuals focus on selected aspects of aural input, construct meaning from passages and relate what is heard to existing knowledge" (O'Malley& Chamot, 1990:137)<sup>[8]</sup>. Listening comprehension is a complex and active process in which listeners must distinguish between sounds, understand vocabulary and grammatical structures, and avoid stress and anxiety as well. On the contrary, it is also a passive process in which listeners must respond to what they hear as soon as possible in a limited period of time.

## 3. The methods used to cultivate students listening autonomous learning

Firstly, stimulate students' learning motivation. A person needs to satisfy two conditions to gain the ability of autonomous learning. One is the willingness to learn, the other is that he or she knows how to learn. The motivation for autonomous learning is intrinsically (Pang Weiguo,2003)<sup>[9]</sup>.So it is positive to cultivate intrinsic motivation of students for independent learning. A number of factors can influence this motivation, including self-efficacy, results expectation, study interest, etc. If the combination of these inner motivation factors reaches an ideal degree, then it will promote autonomous learning. Student is the internal cause of the study. This requires teachers to adopt flexible teaching methods and organize a variety of classroom activities under the principle of students-centered, in order to let the students feel the sense of accomplishment ,which can stimulate students' motivation in study and increase their

active participation in autonomous learning (Li Youliang, 2011)<sup>[10]</sup>. The development of students' autonomous learning concept needs teacher's help. In the teaching process, teachers should enable the students to aware of the importance and the value of the autonomous learning. If students hold a positive and active attitude to learn, then the autonomous learning will become an initiative, spontaneous behavior, and the students will be responsible for the autonomous learning happily.

Secondly, help students make clear learning goals. The ultimate purpose of autonomous learning is for an individual to construct his or her own meaning. It is undoubtedly correct to emphasis on the construction of meaning in the learning process of knowledge, but it is not appropriate to construct meaning if not analyze the goal of study. The right way is to elect the basic concept, basic theory, and basic method as the topic of the learned knowledge on the basis of the analysis of the learning goal, and then can help students to construct his or her own meaning. By doing this, students can effectively improve the autonomous listening.

Thirdly, cultivate students' learning skills. To master the learning skills is the guarantee of autonomous listening learning tasks for students. The effective learning skills can make the students' autonomous listening learning much easier. On the one hand, teacher need teach students some listening study skills through different ways like lectures, discussion, classroom activities to let the students understand and master certain study skills; On the other hand, Everyone has his own habit and learning methods, students should try their best to find a method which is suitable for their listening study. Students should develop a good habit of previewing textbook before class, which can make them understand what teachers are talking about easily. At the same time, students can make learning plans to help them arrange the study time. According to the learning plans, students can schedule their study time. Furthermore, students should make full use of learning resources, such as English newspapers, the Internet and libraries and so on. Meanwhile they also should learn how to select useful listening materials which can make their autonomous listening learning more effectively.

Fourthly, create a favorable English learning environment. As we all known, As a second language learner, it is easy to be interfered by the learning environment. In order to improve learners' autonomous listening competence, it is necessary to create a favorable English learning environment for language learners. Teachers can use the target language as much as possible in class and provide more practice opportunities for learners. In addition, college can provide an autonomous learning center with good condition. Some English activities like English corner and English competition can be provided to learners as well which provide learners with the opportunity to improve their learner autonomy in English listening.

Fifthly, cultivate students' autonomous English listening study out of class. Autonomous listening out of the class provides a better platform for intrinsically motivated learning. It makes it possible for the students to choose learning materials which they are interested in, and they can work out their own study plan. It promises students to keep on learning independently and autonomously. The author thinks that cultivating students' autonomous English listening study out of class also needs teachers' guidance and help. Because a variety of listening resources may confuse the students, it is the teacher's responsibility to guide them in selecting interesting resources for learning English, informing them how to select what is of value.

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