



Fostering Learner Autonomy Through Learning Journals in the EFL Classroom: A Tertiary Education Case Study

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to explore the role of learning journals as an effective pedagogical instrument for fostering learner autonomy in English language acquisition for students in higher education. Over the course of one week, participants were required to keep a learning journal in which they tracked the progress they made in English by consciously engaging with linguistic input. The task extended beyond the boundaries of formal academic instruction, as students independently selected learning materials aligned with their personal interests and preferences, which aroused their intrinsic motivation. The linguistic input was derived from leisure-oriented and enjoyable activities chosen by the students, such as watching films, listening to music, reading books, or participating in peer interactions. The findings indicate that the use of learning journals fostered autonomous language learning behaviours, as this practice enhanced their decision-making skills, which contributed to the development of a more personalised learning experience tailored to their individual learning needs and objectives. Through this practice, learners acknowledged their progress, identified challenges and areas of difficulty, and developed their metacognitive awareness by actively planning, monitoring, and evaluating their learning process. The study was conducted with a group of 14 students enrolled at a Romanian university. The primary research method consisted of the use of the learning journals, which served both as a pedagogical tool to promote autonomy in English language acquisition and as a research instrument to collect qualitative data.

Keywords: higher education; language acquisition; metacognition; qualitative research; self-directed learning