

CHINESE NON-ENGLISH MAJOR'S AUTONOMOUS LEARNING: USING ENGLISH  
ONLINE RESOURCES

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CHINESE NON-ENGLISH MAJOR'S AUTONOMOUS LEARNING: USING ENGLISH  
ONLINE RESOURCES

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Abstract

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Under the Supervision of Professor David Gillota

College English is the basic compulsory course of the non-English majors. In recent years, with the improvement of people's living standard and the development of network technology, more and more college students begin to own their own laptops and mobile phones. The university teaching buildings, campus and dormitories are all covered with wireless network signal, which provides convenience for students to surf on the Internet. However, quite a lot of college students are not able to make use of the powerful online learning resources.

The main purpose of this thesis is to know the current situation of Chinese non-English major's autonomous learning. The research includes the description of autonomous learning, motivation, web-based learning and brief review of researches on the correlation between English learning motivation and autonomous learning competence. Then talks about the positive and negative influence of autonomous learning in web-based college English.

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## **Chapter I Introduction**

With the popularization in higher education of the multimedia technology and network technology, network has become a very important influencing factors in people's living and Learning. College students' level of network autonomous learning not only affects their academic performance, but also have a profound impact on their life. On the one hand, various information knowledge provides convenience for students, on the other hand, imperfections in management and overmuch content lead some problems in students' self-regulated learning, such as material choice, blindness of learning and so on. This paper analyzed the advantages and disadvantages through the internet of students' autonomous learning, try to put forward some corresponding measures, aim at enhancing the ability of students' autonomous learning, so that they can improve their English.

### **Statement of the Problem**

What is the negative influence of web-based autonomous learning? How to make web-based autonomous learning more effective and reliable?

### **Definition of Terms**

Autonomous learning: Holec (1981) suggested that autonomous learning refers to "the ability to take charge of one's learning, autonomous learners has the ability to select learning

objectives, make learning plans, and choose learning materials and learning methods in their independent learning.”

Web-based autonomous learning: Ritchie and Hoffinan (1997,cited in Lu Xin) demonstrate web-based learning is a hypermedia-based instructional program that utilizes the attributes and resources of the web to create a meaningful learning environment where learning is fostered and supported.

### **Purpose of the Study**

This study is designed to explore the influencing factors of on line autonomous learning of non-English college major students. I hope to identify the issues which affect college students in on line autonomous learning so that we can find the strategies to improve on line autonomous learning of non-English major college students.

### **Significance of the Study**

Internet is a double-edged sword, problems like such as blindness of learning, poor information processing capability, the lack of help and the lack of assessment and reflection for present learning. These problems lead to students’ inefficient learning, so we need to take some measures and strategies to promote learner’s autonomy.

## **Methodology**

Library research plan:

- Data collection, block out the outline of the seminar paper according to the data.
- Find the related Chinese and English thesis, read briefly.
- Read carefully according to the outline and make proper ad

## Chapter II Review of Literature

### Description of Autonomous Learning

**Definitions of Autonomous Learning.** “Independent” language learning. At present, scholars have not reached a common ground on the basic concepts. The definitions made by different experts are as follows: Holec (1981) states that autonomous learning is the ability to take charge of one's own learning, and is an ability or capacity that needs to be acquired, rather than a process. Dickinson (1987) suggests that it occurs in a situation in which the learner is totally responsible for all of the decisions concerned with his/her learning and the implementation of those decisions. Boud (1988) defines the main characteristic of autonomy as an approach to learning in which undergraduates take some significant responsibility for their own learning over and above responding to instruction. Little(1991) sees learner autonomy as 'essentially a matter of the learner's psychological relation to the process and content of learning--a capacity for detachment, critical reflection, decision-making, and independent action. Wenden(1991) thinks that autonomous learners have acquired the learning strategies, the knowledge about learning and the attitudes that enable them to use these skills and knowledge confidently, flexibly, appropriately and independently. Kenny(1993) states that autonomy is not only the freedom to learn but also the chance to become a person. Littlewood(1996) suggests that an autonomous learner is one who has an independent capacity to make and carry out the choices which govern his or her actions. Benson(1996) believed that autonomization is necessarily a transformation of the learner as a social individual. Autonomy not only transforms individuals, it also transforms the social situations and structures in which they are participants.

From all of the above, we know different kinds of definitions, according to the author's understanding, autonomous learning is the competence which is possessed by the learners of their own English learning. It also motivates learners to make the best decision for their own education.

**Components of Autonomous Learning.** Holec (1981) defines autonomous learning as the competence to take charge of one's own learning, stating that this competence is not inborn but must be acquired either by natural means or by formal learning. Talking about autonomy, it means the learners' ability to control their learning process consciously. Another important goal of teaching is that educators need to focus on the students' understanding; it is the best way to develop learners' autonomous learning.

**Characteristics of Autonomous Learning.** Different researchers use different angles to view autonomous learning. They try to list the characteristics associated with successful autonomous learning. According to the degree of learners' autonomy in the process of learning, Bonham (1991) divided autonomous learning into three levels: Teacher-Directed Learner, Self-Directed Instructional Model and Self-Directed Inquiry Model. Each learning form is shown as follows: Teacher-Directed Learner: (1)take active part in the learning activities which dominated by the teachers.(2)don't want to design and construct learning content.(3)under the teacher's good organize and arrange, it showed higher learning motivation.

Bonham classifies autonomous learning in three ways. For Teacher-Directed Learner, students are able to take an active part in learning, under the guidance of teachers. Students showed resistance to designing and building learning content. However, under the teachers'

organization and arrangement, they showed higher learning motivation. For Self-Directed Instructional Model, students have strengthened the concept of what to learn and how to learn. They can cooperate with the teacher's teaching plan and make detailed arrangements and adjustments. They can complete the requirements of the teachers' content of the design and construction. For Self-Directed Inquiry Model, students know what to learn but don't know how to achieve the goals. They feel it is difficult to make a study plan, but they can adjust learning goals and content during the process of learning. This type of learner has strong learning motivation and study interests. The description shows as follows:

#### Bonham's Autonomous Learning Classification

	Teacher-Directed Learner	Self-Directed Instructional	Self-Directed Inquiry
Description	1. take active part in learning activities which dominated by the teachers 2. Don't want to design and construct the learning content 3. Showed higher learning motivation under the teachers' organization and arrangement	1. The concept of what to learn and how to learn 2. Be able to set their own learning goals and content in detail. 3. Teachers' encouragement and guidance can greatly stimulate students' learning motivation.	1. Know what to learn but don't know how to achieve your goals. 2. Have difficulty in making learning plan but can adjust in the process of learning. 3. The students themselves have strong learning motivation and study interest.

Benson and Voller (1997) claim that autonomous learning contains five parts: (1) for

situation in which learners study entirely on their own; (2) for a set of skills which can be learned and applied in self-directed learning; (3) for an inborn capacity which is suppressed by institutional education; (4) for the exercise of learners' responsibility for their own learning; (5) for the right of learners to determine the direction of their own learning. According to Candy (1991), the learners who are capable of autonomous learning will have the following characteristics; (1) be methodical and disciplined; (2) be logical and analytical; (3) be reflective and self-aware; (4) demonstrate curiosity, openness and motivation; (5) be flexible; (6) be interdependent and interpersonally competent; (7) be persistent and responsible; (8) be venturesome and creative show confidence and have a positive self-concept; (9) show confidence and have a positive self-concept; (10) be independent and self-sufficient; (11) have developed information seeking and retrieval skills; (12) have knowledge about and skill at learning processes; (13) develop and use criteria for evaluating.

In a word, the researchers describe their own understanding about autonomous learning. Although they have little agreement with each other, they have much the same. Autonomous learning means the learners need to take responsibility for themselves. They are supposed to have clear learning goals and attitude; they can choose their own learning goals, learning content and learning process.

### **Description of Motivation**

**Definitions of Motivation.** In learning a second language, motivation is the important factor that determine the success of it. Educators often described motivation as a desire, an

emotion, or an inner drive. This leads in some actions to reach a certain goal. Motivation is to explain why human beings choose to learn the language.

There are many other definitions of motivation. There are a lot of scholars who come up with their own understandings. Gardner (1985) suggests that motivation is the extent to which an individual works or strives to learn the language because of a desire to do so and the satisfaction experienced in this activity. Crooks & Schmidt (1991) define it as interest and enthusiasm for the material used in class; persistence with the learning task, as is indicated in levels of attention or action for an extended duration; and levels of concentration and enjoyment. Gardner & MacIntyre (1993) thought that motivation is the desire to achieve a goal, effort extended in this direction and satisfaction with the task. Motivation was assessed by three different measures: (1) desire to learn the language; (2) motivational intensity; (3) attitudes toward learning the language. Ellis (1994) believes that motivation refers to the effort that the learners put into learning a second language as a result of their need or desire to learn it. Brown (2001) states that motivation is the extent to which you make choices about goals to pursue and the effort you will devote to that pursuit.

Except for all the different definitions, scholars agree that motivation is related to someone's efforts and their choice of a particular action. Domyei (2005) describes motivation as being responsible for the reason people decide to do something; the time they are willing to sustain the activity; the energy they are going to pursue it.

From the author's perspective, motivation can be defined as the desire, interest and enthusiasm of achieving a goal, effort extended in this direction and satisfaction with the material used in class; persistence with the learning task.

**Definitions of learning Motivation.** From the traditional view, motivation in teaching and learning is the power of sustaining learning behaviors. This makes learning behavior into a inner psychological state of a certain learning objectives. From the author's perspective, learning motivation is pushing the of learners' inner power in learning activities directly.

**Classifications of Learning Motivation.** There are two main categories of motivation: intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. The most well-known category is that Deci and Ryan (1985) categorize motivation into intrinsic motivation and extrinsic motivation.

Intrinsic motivation is involved in activity which is enjoyable and satisfying to do. Students with intrinsic motivation are executing the behavior for its own sake, not the external pressure or teachers' praise. In other words, we can say intrinsic motivation is a kind of interest and it connects with the long-term success. Extrinsic motivation is to do a thing for some other reasons rather than the interest itself. It refers to those actions carried out to achieve some purpose, such as gaining a reward or avoiding a punishment. The extrinsic motivation behaves to attain some outcome, so it comes from the result of outer factors and connects with the short-term.

Deci and Ryan (1985) claim that intrinsic motivation leads to more effective learning. Motivation tends to be higher in learners who are interested in the learning tasks and the learning outcomes for their own sake rather than for rewards that result from success.

Intrinsic and extrinsic motivation are always used together. In understanding human behavior, psychologists have long been interested in what motivates specific actions. Debates have pitted extrinsic motivators (e.g. rewards/punishment) against intrinsic motivation in attempting to determine what best motivates individuals. Generally speaking, to distinguish intrinsic motivation and extrinsic motivation, we can get better understanding from the following comparison: intrinsic motivation comes from interest and desire while extrinsic motivation comes from reward and goal; intrinsic motivation connects with the long-term success while extrinsic motivation with the short-term; intrinsic motivation is performed for challenge while extrinsic is performed for easy work; intrinsic motivation is described as a curiosity interest while extrinsic is described as pleasing teacher or getting grades; intrinsic motivation refers to independent mastery while extrinsic motivation refers to dependence on teacher in figuring out problems; intrinsic motivation is independent judgment while extrinsic is reliance on teachers' judgment about what to do; intrinsic motivation refers to internal criteria for success while extrinsic refers to external criteria for success. However, extrinsic motivation is argued to vary considerably in its relative autonomy and thus can either reflect external control or true self-regulation. The relations of both classes of motives to basic human needs for autonomy, competence and relatedness are discussed.

### **Definitions of Web-based Learning**

Web-based learning is also named online learning. It is a booming mode of learning with the rapid development of information and communication technologies. Now, it becomes a powerful complementary tool to the classroom teaching. Many researchers define it, some of which are listed below.

Khan (1997) views web-based learning as a new approach which delivers instruction to distant learners with the help of the internet. Khan's definition focuses on the function of the web distance education. In fact, web-based learning is useful for not only distance education, but also classroom learning. Ritchie and Hoffinan (1997) define web-based learning as a hypermedia-based instructional program which utilizes possible resources from the Internet to create a meaningful learning environment where learning can be supported and fostered. Wang and Beasley (2002) hold that web-based learning is a multi-media learning situation where multi-media forms of information can be stored and flexibly accessed by any appropriate users at any time.

Generally speaking, the main features of web-based learning are: (1)No space and time constraint; (2)Real individualized learning; (3)Rich and authentic learning materials. Web-based learning, which is based on the availability of the computers and Internet, is considered to be a very helpful tool to enhance autonomy. Web-based learning has the advantage of setting learners free from the constraint of time and space which enables them to learn at any time and in any places as long as they have computers connected to the Internet. Thus, it makes autonomous learning possible. It can be said that a web-based learning environment offers a solid foundation and a good situation for learners to conduct autonomous learning.

After discussing the definitions of autonomous learning and web-based learning, definitions to web-based autonomous learning can be drawn. In this research, we define it as a kind of learning during which the learners take charge of their own learning with the help of the Internet and Web.

## **Definition of Web-based Autonomous Learning**

Web-based autonomous learning can be seen as the combination of autonomous learning and web-based learning. Before we discuss the definition of web-based autonomous learning, we'd better review the definition of autonomous learning and web-based learning separately.

College English autonomous learning under the network environment refers to students, under the macro guidance of teachers, using internet tools and resources to learn English, practice, communicate, utilize and establish knowledge and skills. Meanwhile, students can utilize all kinds of valuable online information materials according to individual needs, study and communicate through teaching platform, flexibly use language in virtual communication environments and construct autonomous learning ability to improve learning efficiency. It makes the teaching theory concrete, and at the same time, it directly guides teaching practice. So it builds a bridge between theory and practice. With the network teaching environment, students' English learning autonomy is greatly increased. Students can set learning goals according to their own specific circumstances, choose appropriate teaching contents and learning strategies in order to improve their subjective consciousness and foreign language level. Network teaching formally changes the traditional teaching method and environment.

## **Description of Learning Motivation in Web-based College English**

Learning motivation has been a key factor in college English since the web entered into the field of teaching and learning. According to the previous studies, researches have shown that low motivation results in poor achievement while high motivation leads to wonderful fulfillment. If learners have high motivation in using the technology, or if they have passion in the resources

which the web offers, they will learn English successfully. High motivation makes the learners develop a positive attitude towards English learning. Therefore, it is very important to enhance the learners' motivation in web-based context for college English teaching and learning.

Recent researches show that there are a lot of positive effects of web on learners' motivation. Chun, D. M. (1994) has found that computer-assisted classroom discussion motivates student-initiated discussion more than teacher-initiated discussion. Warschauer (1996b) identifies that students' sense of achievement has increased in technology-mediated second language writing class, which in turn, increased student motivation. Thus, learning motivation in a web-based context can stimulate learners to produce more output.

Researchers argue that learners learn more actively, enthusiastically, and independently in the web-based context. They enjoy the relaxing learning atmosphere and web-based resources (computerized grammar, vocabulary exercises, video-based listening exercises, vivid pictures, movies, BBS, interact with the teachers and classmates and so on) which can make their English learning more enjoyable.

### **Brief Review of Researches on the Correlation Between English Learning Motivation and Autonomous Learning Competence**

#### **Relevant Researches on the Correlation Between English Learning Motivation and Autonomous Learning Competence Abroad. *Autonomous Learning Precedes Motivation.***

Some of the researchers (Dickinson, 1995, Deci & Ryan 1985, Dornyei and Csizer 1998 and so on) claim that autonomous learning precedes motivation. They regard motivation as a product of autonomous learning.

Dickinson (1995) puts forward that enhanced motivation is conditional upon autonomous learning. In his work “Autonomy and Motivation: a literature review,” he concludes that enhanced motivation is conditional on learners taking responsibility for their own learning and perceiving that their learning successes or failures are to be attributed to their own efforts and strategies rather than to factors outside of their control, namely, autonomy precedes motivation.

“Without sufficient motivation, even individuals with the most remarkable abilities cannot accomplish long-term goals” (Dornyei, 1998:117). Deci & Ryan (1985) insist that the sense of satisfaction brought by intrinsic motivation results from learners' ability and autonomy. They point out that fostering autonomous learning can enhance learning motivation. It means that if learning motivation wants to get the enhancement it would support autonomous learning.

These above researchers, believe autonomous learning results in learning motivation and autonomous learners become more highly motivated. They become more active and initiative when they get great success in language learning.

***Motivation Precedes Autonomous Learning.*** Other researchers argue that learning motivation determines autonomous learning. Spratt et al. (2002) make an investigation to explore the relationship between the two variables and they have found that learner autonomy is largely influenced by learning motivation and that before training students' learner autonomy, teachers must ensure that the learners are highly motivated. They state in their research that from the students' perspective, motivation would appear to precede autonomy while low motivation would discourage the pursuit of autonomous activities.

Ushioda (1996) claims the primitive power of learning motivation on learner autonomy. In her research, she states that "Without motivation, there is no autonomy" (p. 32). Littlewood (1996) considers learners' competence and willingness to assume responsibility for their learning to be "at the core of the notion of autonomy" and that "Willingness depends both on the motivation and the confidence to take responsibility for the choices required" (p. 204). Motivation is a necessary precursor of autonomy according to Littlewood. Cotterall (1999) focuses on self-efficacy, rendering supports to the idea that motivation can be a precursor of successful autonomous learning. Self-efficacy is regarded as a component in Gardner's motivation model. According to Cotterall, learners self-efficacy and their efforts put into language learning may result in autonomous learning.

To summarize, motivation is correlated to autonomous learning. Learners with high motivation can learn autonomously. Autonomous learning can enhance motivation as motivation can promote autonomous learning.

## Chapter III

### Conclusions and Recommendations

#### Positive Influence of Autonomous Learning in Web-based College English

Web-based learning is an important aspect of education modernization. The internet's unique features and characteristics provide convenience for students. It also has positive influence on learning. First of all, the internet offers a wide range of knowledge. It can give college students some basic information, which helps students expand their horizons, and choose material that suits themselves. This can help students improve their own lack of English(eg. listening, speaking, reading and writing) and promote students' all-around development. Secondly, students can find their interests easily from the internet during the learning process. From the traditional to web-based learning, autonomous learning is an aid in the transformation of classroom English learning to students having the initiative to learn. This provides an easy learning environment for college students' English learning, which helps students absorb and digest the knowledge. Finally, the internet provides students with the ability to share resources, mutual cooperation and a cooperation exchange platform. Although many researchers think that some chat tools online may distract students' attention, reasonable use of some chat tools can allow students to make like-minded friends. The students' learning experience, resource sharing, problem solving, learning atmosphere and the amount of various kinds of resources can be improved by the use of the internet.

When compared to the more independent style of learning English by using the internet, we can see that the education in China is still based on the traditional indoctrination style.

Education according to one's natural ability only happens in a few universities. However, the variety of educational and research sites can make up for this educational vacuum. Educators should develop students' intuitive thinking ability and interests in learning materials. To stimulate students' interests in learning enables students to transform the external educational requirements into their own education needs. Then they can internalize their own personality and achieve educational purpose. Web-based communication platforms provides a tool for communication and discussion among students. The students can find mentor in English learning, broaden their horizons and provide a reference for their own learning.

### **Negative Influence of Autonomous Learning in Web-based College English**

Many things in the world have their advantages and disadvantages, and the internet is no exception. On one hand, the internet as a new medium of communication, has satisfied students' information resource sharing, training and other needs. On the other hand, the internet itself has some defects. The complex internet environment contains too many ideas and resources, so due to the immature psychological development skills of college students, the internet's reliability can be greatly reduced. Some college students lack the ability to screen and filter online information, so the overwhelming amount of resources can reduce the effectiveness of autonomous learning. Moreover, in such a colorful internet environment, college students are often distracted by other, more entertaining sites; this results in low efficiency of English autonomous learning and possible internet addiction.

The poor quality of internet resources, as well as the lack of efficient search and screening mechanisms, brings a lot of trouble for students. The learner's adaptability and

learning support are taken into account, and the complicated content is easy to confuse the students who do not have the mature judgment in the learning phase. Also, because of commercial interests and intellectual property rights, the internet courses developed by the university and internet companies must be purchased before used. Students often search online for a certain source, but they cannot find it or their targeted source is not clear. It takes time and effort to make a little difference. Moreover, the diversification of the main body of English education and teaching methods and techniques, make it difficult to implement the sharing of resources in practice. For the purpose of college English students' autonomous learning, the number of available resources is greatly limited. Additionally, there is a set of survey data that shows that too much information can lead to students' preference for entertainment rather than autonomous learning itself. 34% of students are chatting online, 28% are playing games, 30% are checking information, and 8% for the other accounts. It seems that 62% of college students are engaged in online activities unrelated to study and work. As well as provide information and tools for autonomous learning, the internet can also reduce the efficiency of students' autonomous learning. How to identify the authenticity of the information, how to select from the huge amount of information and how to avoid the distraction is a very tough problem.

### **The reasons and solutions to the problems of Autonomous Learning in Web-based College English**

For Chinese non-English majors' autonomous learning, solving the problems of education is the key point. Due to the guidance of traditional college English teaching, learning motivation and levels are uneven. The ability to develop autonomous learning strategies is low and difficult

to grasp. These are mainly manifested in college students' self-control and self-evaluation ability.

In order to solve these problems, the society, schools, teachers and students need to work together. First, schools should pay attention to the mental acuity of college students. There is a lot of good and bad information on the internet and students need to focus on their target research. Through this, college students will be able to choose English learning materials with a clear head and a high sense of judgment. Students can then strengthen the internal learning motivation under the guidance of teachers, establish a scientific concept of learning, and cultivate their good habit of autonomous learning. Autonomous learning is to learn without teachers, however, under the guidance of teachers, students can learn to develop their own learning strategies. The teacher guidance refers to the teacher providing advice and reminders; provide reference for students to establish their own independent learning strategies. For example, the teacher can provide some English learning website and can remind students to pay attention to the time and their efficiency. Students are required to develop their own English learning plan and teachers supervise their completion. Lastly, the society, schools, teachers and students need to participate together. At present, the government has established the relevant regulations of information network management; the external condition that the society should create a suitable network environment for the students. In this case, students should comply with the requirements of community of internet users, set an example for others, and improve their self-monitoring and self-management. In addition to strengthening the school website construction and management, teachers can also guide college students to study independently. College students can make full use of the advantages of school networks, and can combine the

autonomous learning and mutual learning with the network platform. This will improve the efficiency of learning and make up for the shortcomings of traditional teaching. Students should adjust according to their learning motivation, participate in web-based learning from the perspective of self-improvement, overcome all kinds of learning difficulties; and resist the temptation of the internet.

All in all, autonomous learning is a kind of open learning. Learners must work out the feasible learning plans according to their own learning needs, and reflects on the requirements of the procedural learning, through the management of the learning objectives, realize the learning targets gradually and continuously. English learning styles and strategies will continue to changes under the network environment. It will be a big topic for educators to face on how to make network play a role in English learning. It is essential to establish a modern teaching mode and personalized learning and autonomous learning, supported by modern information technology, and gradually form a new mode of college English teaching.

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