

Overview of Mobile Autonomous Learning in Chinese Higher Education

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Abstract: Modern technology information makes students to acquire knowledge straightforwardly and quickly, assisting learners to achieve autonomous learning efficiently. In the context of Chinese higher education, autonomous learning increasingly involves Internet-based learning. Thus, by reviewing related literature, this study focuses on students' autonomous learning in mobile learning environment.

1. Introduction

With the widespread use of modern technology information, mobile devices are commonly used among higher education students. This powerful tool makes students to acquire knowledge straightforwardly and quickly, assisting learners to achieve autonomous learning efficiently. In the context of higher education, autonomous learning is implemented for it promises to provide unlimited participation and open access for anyone, which increasingly involves Internet-based learning.

Additionally, Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China issued an important policy, proclaiming that the government and relevant departments should actively guide students to self-management and active learning, improve their learning efficiency and abilities to learn autonomously. Students' autonomy ensures their constant self-development and plays a crucial role in providing lifelong learning. Therefore, it is of great importance to explore students' autonomous learning. Since mobile technology assisting various kinds of learning has grown considerably in recent years, it is necessary to research on mobile autonomous learning in Chinese higher education.

2. Autonomous Learning

Autonomy in learning refers to the learner's possibility of controlling important aspects of one's learning^[1]. However, in this paper, autonomous learning is defined as the capacity to reflect critically, make decision and act independently in the process of learning. The concept of learner autonomy has been discussed and demonstrated by many scholars and practitioners since the 1980s^[2]. Later, the number of literatures in terms of autonomous learning from the whole world raised increasingly.

Researches on learner autonomy have become hot in the modern education. The concept of autonomous learning was first developed in the Council of Europe's Modern Languages Project in the 1970s, which was designed to provide adults with the lifelong learning opportunities to learn a

foreign language. Since the 1980s, the concept of learner autonomy has been discussed and demonstrated by many scholars and practitioners. Therefore, many definitions of autonomous learning can be found in education, especially in language learning. Holec's definition is one of the most cited in language learning studies^[3]. It states that learner autonomy is the "ability to take charge of one's own learning". Holec proposed that to be responsible for learning is being responsible for all decisions related to all aspects of learning. Similar to Holec, Little's definition is that autonomy is an ability to be independent, think critically, make decisions, and act independently. In his definition, there is a connection between psychology and autonomous learning. He proclaimed that the capacity to manage one's own learning "depends upon certain underlying psychological capacities".

Little interpreted Holec's definition that the acceptance of responsibility requires that we begin to learn the skills to reflect and analyze, which enable us to implement plans, monitoring and evaluation of our learning^[4]. He illustrated the fact that learners share responsibility for their learning process, think critically when planning, monitoring and evaluating learning. Dickinson described learner autonomy as the learner's complete responsibility for all decisions related to his learning and the execution of those decisions. The concept of autonomy is also defined by Littlewood that it is "learners' ability and willingness to make choices independently". Willingness depends on motivation and confidence to be responsible for their own learning. The aim of autonomous learning is to create students who cannot rely entirely on their teachers.

Based on the previous review, researches on autonomous learning mainly focus on the relationship between autonomy and language proficiency, strategies to promote learners' autonomous learning and influencing factors towards autonomous learning. As is illustrated previously, autonomous learning has been applied in the discipline of language learning. For instance, Kemala illuminated in her research that a successful autonomous learner is often influenced by several factors^[5]. In terms of learner autonomy and proficiency, Ünal certified in their research that not sufficient quantitative or qualitative studies had been carried out on learner autonomy in second language learning.

3. Mobile Autonomous Learning

Thanks to technology, opportunities for interaction, situated learning and support to learn outside the formal contexts have been improved considerably. Recently, mobile technology has enabled learners to access resources in an off-campus context, and potentially linking affordances in the environment with immediate support. Thus, there is a better understanding of the role of out-of-school learning, not only concerning the time that learners spend on learning and practicing, but also concerning education.

In terms of autonomous learning in online courses, Lee demonstrated that examining the influencing factors of autonomous learning in online open courses of university students would help them improve their ability to learn independently^[6]. Some university students' autonomous learning ability is relatively weak. Meanwhile, computers, mobile phones and other electronic products are becoming ubiquitous among university students. It can be seen gradually that our understanding of autonomous learning is shifting to more specific abilities to adapt to different learning environments, and that mobile technology plays an important role in promoting it. Furthermore, the technology represents the extent and importance of learners' engagement in social networks. Therefore, mobile technology helps researchers learn more about the meaning of learner autonomy practically.

4. Autonomous Learning in Chinese Higher Education

As is illustrated in literature, researches concerning autonomous learning in the context of

Chinese higher education mainly focus on the discipline of English learning as well. For instance, Wei proposed that, in China, it was shown that students were passive and dependent in the process of English learning. Teaching mode should be transferred to student-centered, paying more attention to the cultivation of their language use abilities and autonomous learning ability^[7].

Similar to Wei's research, Yue revealed in a descriptive study that longitudinal research was limited, so more research was needed to explore the unique characteristics of language learning autonomy in Chinese higher education^[8]. While Yue did a research regards to the factors influencing autonomous learning, Cheng et al. explored the relationship between motivation and learner autonomy. Wang proclaimed that students' autonomous learning status were quite different due to different background: male university students' autonomous learning was slightly better than that of female students^[9]. The influencing factors of university students' autonomous learning were generally internal factors.

Apart from the previous researches, in China, there are researches in terms of the relationship between autonomous learning and self-efficacy as well. For example, Li's analysis showed that non-English major postgraduates' autonomous learning and self-efficacy were at moderate levels^[10]. There was a moderate positive correlation between self-efficacy and their autonomous learning.

5. Summary

In general, considerable researches in terms of learner autonomy are found in the discipline of English Language learning. However, in the present technology and information age, there are challenges in applying autonomous learning in different fields, especially in the context of Chinese higher education.

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