

## **TEACHER-GUIDED AUTONOMOUS LEARNING OF FOREIGN BUSINESS LANGUAGES IN A EUROPEAN CONTEXT**

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**Abstract:** In an era of globalization, advanced technologies, and access to information sources, the need to develop autonomous learning skills of foreign business languages has become increasingly crucial. These competencies help students become more capable global citizens who can handle the demands of a rapidly changing world. Because of this, modern education needs to encourage and facilitate the growth of these competencies, laying the groundwork for students to become lifelong learners.

The teacher, traditionally viewed as the main supplier of knowledge, an expert who transmits information in a predominantly one-directional manner, has to take on now a new role as a guide and facilitator of the learning process, supporting students to become autonomous learners and develop their own learning skills.

The article's main goals are to elucidate the critical role that teachers play in fostering students' autonomy during the business foreign language learning process, as well as to identify practical methods for carrying out this function.

The purpose of this article is to investigate how teachers might support students in acquiring the abilities necessary for autonomous learning, enabling them to become self-sufficient business language learners. Developing autonomy in learning business English for our university students will not only enhance their professional competence but also prepare them to adapt to the ever-evolving global marketplace.

**Keywords:** autonomous learning, foreign business language, teacher, university, students

**JEL Classification:** A23

### **Introduction**

The concept of autonomous learning of foreign business languages is essential to contemporary education because it emphasizes the learner's capacity to supervise and guide their own learning process. Independence in learning is essential in this day and age of rapid access to knowledge since it fosters critical thinking and self-reflection in addition to knowledge acquisition. By taking charge of goal-setting, resource selection, progress tracking, and self-correction, learners who practice autonomous learning make sure their education is ongoing and customized to meet their requirements. In the current educational setting, the significance of acquiring autonomous learning skills is especially clear when it comes to language learning. Learning a business language goes beyond theoretical knowledge; it requires constant practice and adaptation to real-world situations because language is a tool for both communication and cultural understanding. With the use of autonomous learning skills, students can tailor their learning experience, investigate real-world language materials, and advance at their own speed toward balanced proficiency in speaking, listening, reading, and writing.

In our increasingly globalized world, with its vast sources of information, building these skills is even more critical. Strong autonomous learning abilities help students become more capable global citizens who can handle the demands of a world that is changing quickly. Because of this, modern education needs to encourage and facilitate the growth of these competences, giving students the foundation they need to become lifelong learners.

The article's main goals are to highlight the critical role that teachers play in fostering students' autonomy during the foreign language learning process and to outline practical methods for carrying out this function. The purpose of this article is to investigate how teachers might support students in acquiring the abilities necessary for autonomous learning, enabling them to become self-sufficient language learners.

The European Council has recognized the Republic of Moldova as a candidate for EU membership, aligning the country with European Union initiatives that promote student-centred education and foster the development of autonomous learning abilities. These frameworks not only respect the diverse backgrounds and individual needs of students but also emphasize equity and inclusion in education, ensuring that all learners have the chance to reach their full potential through ongoing learning. Initiatives like "Education and Training 2020" (ET 2020) and the "European Education Area" stress the need to cultivate European citizens who are capable of lifelong learning in an increasingly dynamic global environment. These strategies encourage EU member states to enhance their education systems by incorporating digital skills, critical thinking, and self-directed learning capacities.

Foreign language proficiency, especially in languages like English, German, and French, plays a key role in Europe's economic landscape. These languages facilitate communication between EU member countries and their partners beyond Europe. Companies looking to operate in multiple European markets must employ staff with linguistic skills so they can understand and respect the cultural and legislative nuances of each country. Studies show that companies investing in the linguistic training of their employees have a higher success rate in international expansion. For example, Germany is one of the largest economies in Europe, and knowledge of the German language can open considerable opportunities in this market. Similarly, English is the dominant language in international transactions, being essential for any company that wishes to participate in the global economy. Additionally, the development of language skills supports workforce mobility within the European Union. Through educational and professional training programs, such as Erasmus+ and other EU initiatives, citizens are encouraged to learn foreign languages to have more employment opportunities in other member states. This mobility not only stimulates local economies but also contributes to creating a more diverse and flexible workforce capable of responding to the challenges of the modern market.

### **Defining Autonomous Learning**

Autonomous learning is a multifaceted concept with deep roots in educational theory, especially in the context of foreign language learning. Rather than viewing students as passive consumers of knowledge, the theoretical underpinnings of autonomous learning place an emphasis on students' active participation in controlling their own learning processes. This approach is supported by various theories and models that highlight how learners can take charge of their language learning journey through self-regulation, goal-setting, and reflection.

The self-regulated learning model developed by (Zimmerman, 2002) is one of the main theoretical frameworks for autonomous learning. According to him, autonomous learning involves three interconnected stages: planning, monitoring, and self-evaluation. In the context of language learning,

this means that, students first establish clear objectives, such as increasing their vocabulary or speaking proficiency. They then devise and put into practice plans to accomplish these objectives, like practicing with native speakers or making use of language learning applications. In order to improve their language proficiency, learners continuously evaluate their success during this process and modify their tactics.

Another key idea in comprehending autonomous learning in developing languages is Albert Bandura's concept of self-efficacy. According to (Bandura, 1997) learners' motivation and perseverance are greatly impacted by their self-efficacy, or belief in their own potential to succeed. High self-efficacy language learners are more likely to take on tough assignments, persevere through difficulties, and employ efficient learning techniques. To become proficient in a new language, they must be proactive in looking for practice opportunities and tools and have faith in their capacity to overcome obstacles.

According to research reviews and literature, metacognitive skills also play a crucial role in autonomous language learning. Planning, observing, and modifying learning tactics are examples of cognitive processes that one can be conscious of and in control of through metacognition. For language learners, this means being able to evaluate their teaching strategies, determine what approaches suit them best, and adjust their plan in light of feedback and experiences. By enhancing their metacognitive abilities, students can customize their language learning approach to fit their unique requirements and learning styles, leading to a more efficient and customized learning experience.

All things considered, the theoretical foundation of autonomous learning in language learning highlights the importance of self-regulation, self-efficacy, and metacognition. Learners can better manage their own education by actively participating in the planning, observing, and assessing stages of the learning process. This method enables them to overcome the challenges of language learning and beyond by improving their language proficiency and fostering lifetime learning skills.

### **The Role of the Teacher in Facilitating Autonomous Learning**

In today's educational system, the role of teachers has evolved significantly, especially when it comes to teaching foreign languages. The teacher was seen traditionally as the main source of knowledge, a specialist who primarily explained information in only one direction. With this method, the learner was positioned as a passive recipient who took in the information being taught. Nevertheless, this paradigm has changed in the information era due to the immediate and widespread access to resources. Now more than ever, teachers must take on the role of mentor and facilitator of the learning process, helping students to grow into self-sufficient individuals who possess the necessary learning competencies.

A leading researcher in student autonomy, (Little, 2007) emphasizes that teachers, in this new role, must encourage students to take responsibility for their own learning, thus shifting the focus from teaching to learning. In the context of language learning, Little argues that teachers should help students develop the skills necessary to manage their own learning processes, including the ability to set goals, select appropriate resources, and reflect on their progress. This may involve guiding students in the use of online resources, such as language learning apps or authentic materials in the target language, allowing them to become independent learners. The teacher thus becomes a mentor who helps students navigate these resources and use them effectively.

Barry Zimmerman, known for his work on self-regulated learning, also emphasizes the critical role teachers play in fostering students' ability to self-regulate and self-evaluate. Zimmerman's model of

self-regulated learning emphasizes that teachers need to teach students how to set clear learning goals, monitor their progress, and adjust their learning strategies when faced with difficulties. Teachers must support students in applying this model in language learning, helping them create personalized learning plans that include activities such as reading, listening, writing, and speaking, tailored to their individual needs and goals.

According to Bandura, teachers play a vital role in cultivating self-efficacy by providing constructive feedback and encouraging reflection, helping students build confidence in their ability to learn a foreign language. This approach ensures that students remain motivated and engaged, even in the face of challenges.

Another important specialist in student autonomy, (Benson, 2011) argues that the teacher's role must also include cultivating intrinsic motivation. Benson suggests that teachers can achieve this by designing learning activities that are meaningful and relevant to students' lives, thereby increasing their engagement and desire to learn. For example, in language learning, teachers can create opportunities for students to use the language in real contexts, such as through project-based learning or interactions with native speakers.

Teachers need to be flexible and adaptable, tailoring their approach to meet the unique needs of each student. Helping each student realize their full potential requires varied support from the teacher in a heterogeneous group where competency levels can differ greatly. For instance, giving more resources to people who advance more slowly or greater challenges to people who advance quickly could be examples of this.

As mentioned, the teacher plays a central role in creating an autonomous learning environment by providing well-structured resources and guidelines. These resources can include adapted textbooks, online platforms, educational apps, and authentic materials such as articles from international media or videos on specific topics. Another important aspect of the support offered by the teacher is encouraging the use of technology as a resource for autonomous learning. Educational platforms can be used to improve students' vocabulary, grammar, and communication skills.

Providing opportunities for self-evaluation and reflection is another successful tactic. Assessments and interactive exercises can be given by the teacher for the students to finish on their own. They can then compare their answers with the answer key that is supplied. They can then focus on improving the areas where they need more practice, identifying their strengths and shortcomings. This methodology not only fosters a development mentality and continual learning habits in students, but it also increases their accountability for their education.

All these elements not only enhance students' language skills but also stimulate their curiosity and intrinsic motivation to learn, allowing them to take responsibility for their own learning and explore topics at their own pace. The teacher's consistent and targeted support, combined with the use of technology and self-assessment opportunities, contributes to the development of long-term learning skills and increases students' intrinsic motivation.

The teacher can initiate projects that involve research, collaboration, and problem-solving, giving students the freedom to choose topics that interest them and manage their own learning process.

*Project-based learning* is incorporated into this technique. Through the completion of challenging assignments, students can apply their newly learned knowledge in practical settings. For instance, in a foreign language course, the instructor can suggest a project where students conduct both linguistic and cultural research to produce a tour guide for a nation where the target language is spoken.

Additional project examples that can help students become autonomous in a variety of professions are as follows:

*Newspaper or magazine creation at school:* Students might collaborate in groups to produce a newspaper or magazine in the target language. Every student will need to conduct research and produce articles on subjects of interest, such as current affairs, sports, or culture, and will be assigned a specific function, such as reporter, editor, or designer. They can collaborate and enhance their writing abilities through this initiative.

*Entrepreneurship project:* Students can develop a business idea, starting with researching a real market, creating a business plan, and promoting their product or service through a marketing campaign. This type of project stimulates critical thinking, collaboration skills, and the creative use of business language.

*Research on climate change:* Students can investigate the impact of climate change in a specific region and propose solutions to reduce it. The project can include written reports, multimedia presentations, and even collaborations with experts or local organizations. This type of project encourages critical thinking, independent research, presentation skills, etc.

*Technology* can also be integrated into school projects to support student autonomy, giving them access to digital resources and opportunities for innovative collaboration and presentation. A concrete example of an autonomous project could be creating a *vlog or podcast* in the target language. Students can work in teams or individually to prepare themed episodes, allowing them to practice speaking, listening, and organizing information in a creative way. This provides the opportunity to integrate multiple skills and explore a topic of interest in a personalized way, increasing motivation and engagement in the learning process. To support these projects, the teacher can provide resources and guidelines but should also give students space to explore and find solutions on their own. Projects also involve reflection and self-assessment, as students need to analyze their own progress and make adjustments throughout the process. The final evaluation can include a reflective discussion in which students describe what they have learned from the project and how they have improved their skills.

### **Methods and Techniques for Developing Autonomy**

*Task-Based Learning (TBL)* is a powerful approach to fostering autonomy in language learners. This method engages students in real-world tasks that require the practical application of the target language, encouraging them to solve problems and communicate independently. For example, students might be tasked with creating a fictional business plan, where they would need to negotiate, justify their decisions, and collaborate in the target language.

*Collaborative projects* also serve as an effective tool for promoting autonomy. These projects require students to work together to complete complex tasks, such as researching a shared topic of interest and presenting their findings through reports or oral presentations. This approach promotes both individual accountability and collective responsibility, as each member must contribute to the group's success.

*Role-play and simulations* provide another valuable technique, allowing students to actively participate in learning by utilizing their creativity and critical thinking. A real-world task might involve simulating a business meeting or conducting a job interview, where students must articulate their ideas and negotiate in the target language. Such activities build communication skills and boost confidence in using the language.

*The use of online resources* can significantly support independent learning, as students are encouraged to explore authentic content, such as articles, podcasts, or video tutorials. A practical



activity might involve having students watch a webinar on a topic of interest in the target language and then write a reflective summary of what they learned.

E-learning platforms such as Moodle, Google Classroom, or Coursera facilitate the creation of flexible and accessible learning environments. These platforms allow teachers to share study materials and assignments, and students can access resources at any time based on their individual needs. They can also include self-assessment tools that provide quick feedback, allowing students to self-assess and adjust their learning approaches. In addition, forums and discussion groups integrated into these platforms foster collaboration and exchange of ideas between students.

*Learning journals* are a tool that allows students to track their progress and set personal learning goals. They can be invited to keep a journal to document the challenges they face, the strategies they employ to overcome them, and reflect on their overall development. For instance, a student might note improvements in understanding authentic audio material after repeated listening and researching unfamiliar words.

*Learning portfolios* are another valuable method for cultivating autonomy. Students can create digital or physical portfolios to showcase work they’ve completed over time—such as essays, presentations, or projects—alongside reflections on how their language skills have progressed and the strategies they used. For instance, a student could demonstrate how an essay was refined based on feedback, highlighting their growth and autonomy in the learning process.

### **Challenges in Fostering Autonomous Learning**

***Resistance to change*** is a common challenge, not only for students but also for educators and the educational system itself. Students accustomed to traditional teaching methods may find self-directed learning confusing or overwhelming, particularly if they haven’t previously been encouraged to take responsibility for their own learning. This can lead to anxiety about organizing their own study time without the constant guidance of a teacher. Similarly, students who rely on structured learning may struggle with the lack of clear direction.

Educators may also resist change, often due to familiarity with conventional methods or insufficient training to implement autonomous learning techniques. Some may worry that giving students more control will slow down progress or impact academic standards. In some cases, teachers may feel their role is diminished in a more student-driven environment.

Resistance is often reinforced by systemic issues, such as rigid curricula and a focus on standardized assessments. Educators may feel pressure to adhere to a strict schedule or prepare students for exams, limiting their ability to adopt strategies that emphasize independent learning.

To address these challenges, continuous teacher training is essential. Professional development courses focused on autonomous learning methods can equip teachers with the confidence and skills needed to support self-directed learning. Also, a gradual transition and fostering a culture of change in the school can help reduce resistance, allowing both teachers and students to gradually adapt to new methods.

Open communication and consistent feedback between teachers and students are also crucial. Teachers should clearly explain the benefits of autonomous learning while offering support and encouragement. This helps alleviate concerns and fosters a smoother transition.

A major challenge is the ***scarcity of resources***. In certain schools or underserved communities, students may lack the necessary technology or materials for independent learning. Restricted access to e-learning platforms or language applications can limit their autonomy, making them dependent

on teacher-supplied resources. Possible solutions could include creating local resources or leveraging free online tools, such as educational websites, articles, and podcasts.

Finding the ***optimal balance between providing guidance and fostering independence*** is an ongoing challenge for educators. Some students may require more structured support at the beginning, while others quickly advance toward self-directed learning. If teachers offer too much intervention, students might become overly reliant. On the other hand, leaving students entirely on their own could lead to feelings of being unsupported.

The solution lies in adopting a personalized and flexible teaching approach. Teachers can assess individual student needs and provide structured tasks that gradually become more autonomous as students gain confidence and competence.

### **The Impact of Mobility on the Need for Autonomous Learning of Business Languages**

In higher education, student mobility within the European Union opens up a wide range of educational and professional opportunities across member states. As more students take advantage of these opportunities, there's a growing need for strong language skills, particularly in business languages, which are critical in various industries. Whether you're a student or an employee, effective communication in a multilingual and multicultural environment is key. This is where autonomous learning becomes crucial.

Being able to independently learn and improve business languages is especially important because people often need to adapt quickly to the language demands of different countries or companies. Autonomous learning allows them to tailor their language skills to the specific needs of their field or position, giving them a competitive edge. It enables them to communicate confidently in professional settings and manage relationships with partners or colleagues across Europe.

A major educational initiative supporting this is the Erasmus+ program, which provides opportunities for students, teachers, and educational staff to take part in international exchanges. These exchanges give participants the chance to immerse themselves in real-world language environments, interact with native speakers, and experience different cultural contexts firsthand.

Beyond Erasmus+, there are other valuable programs like eTwinning, the Lingua program, and the Online Linguistic Support (OLS) platform, all of which are part of Erasmus+. The European Language Label is another initiative that recognizes innovative language-learning projects.

The Erasmus+ program brings many advantages to participants, whether they are students, teachers, or young people engaged in vocational training or volunteering. Here are some of the key benefits:

➤ **Language and Intercultural Skill Development:** One of the biggest perks of Erasmus+ is the opportunity to practice a foreign language in a real-world setting. Living, studying, or working in another country helps improve language abilities, while engaging with different cultures enhances intercultural skills, which are essential in today's globalized world.

➤ **Personal and Professional Growth:** Erasmus+ fosters autonomy, adaptability, and self-confidence. It encourages participants to step out of their comfort zones, navigate new environments, and improve problem-solving skills. On the career front, Erasmus+ boosts employability, as employers value international experience and the transferable skills gained, such as flexibility and teamwork in multicultural settings.

➤ **Expanding Networks:** Participants have the chance to build both personal and professional relationships through Erasmus+. Whether through collaboration with peers from other countries or involvement in international projects, the program helps create a global network that can be beneficial

in future careers. These connections also facilitate the sharing of ideas and best practices, contributing to long-term partnerships and broader perspectives.

## Conclusions

To effectively support the development of autonomous language learning, teachers should act as facilitators, providing a structured but flexible learning environment. A good starting point is encouraging students to self-assess and reflect on their progress. By offering constructive feedback and opportunities for self-evaluation, students can become more aware of their strengths and areas needing improvement.

Additionally, creating an environment that encourages independent exploration—through access to authentic online resources and virtual libraries—can spark curiosity and self-discipline.

Teamwork and collaborative learning are also key. While autonomy emphasizes personal responsibility, group work can be a strong motivator and source of support. Teachers can organize activities that promote sharing resources, ideas, and strategies, allowing students to learn from one another. Moreover, modern technologies such as e-learning platforms and mobile apps for language learning offer students' greater control over managing their study time and pace.

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