

Enhancing Learner Autonomy in Language Learning: A Model For South African University Students

Dr Maureen Lilian Klos

Nelson Mandela University, South Africa

Abstract

Learner autonomy has been a significant focus in language learning since the 1980s, evolving to become central to language education by the late 2000s. Earlier research, including that conducted by the author, has explored scaffolding techniques to support language learning autonomy. The author's 2024 study investigated an autonomous language learning intervention for first-year nursing students at a South African university. Despite South Africa's National School Curriculum being based on constructivist principles of independent learning, students often arrive at university without being well-versed in these approaches.

Prompted by a content assignment requiring students to research and write a descriptive report independently on bacterial diseases in medical English, the intervention followed a model that the 2024 study found lacking in long-term sustainability and adaptability to diverse learning needs and recommended improvements.

This article builds on those recommendations and proposes a model for autonomous language learning interventions. The model includes individualised learning plans, blended learning, scaffolded learning, continuous professional development for educators, collaborative teaching, flexible and adaptive teaching methods, long-term evaluation, and enhanced use of technology. This model aims to provide robust support for students while fostering their independence and self-regulation in language learning (191 words).

Keywords: Autonomous language learning model, scaffolding, individualised learning, collaborative teaching, long-term evaluation, enhanced use of technology